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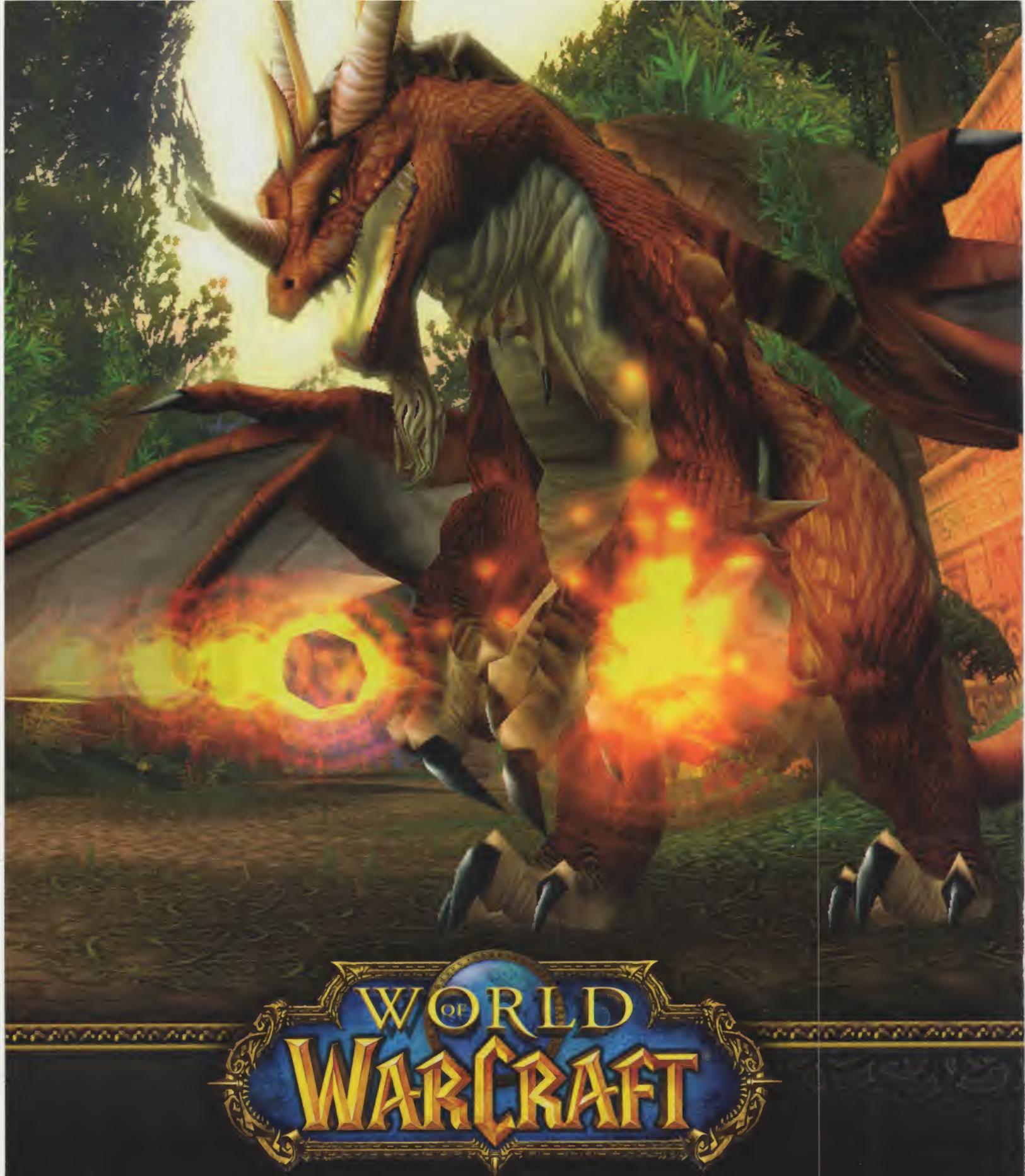
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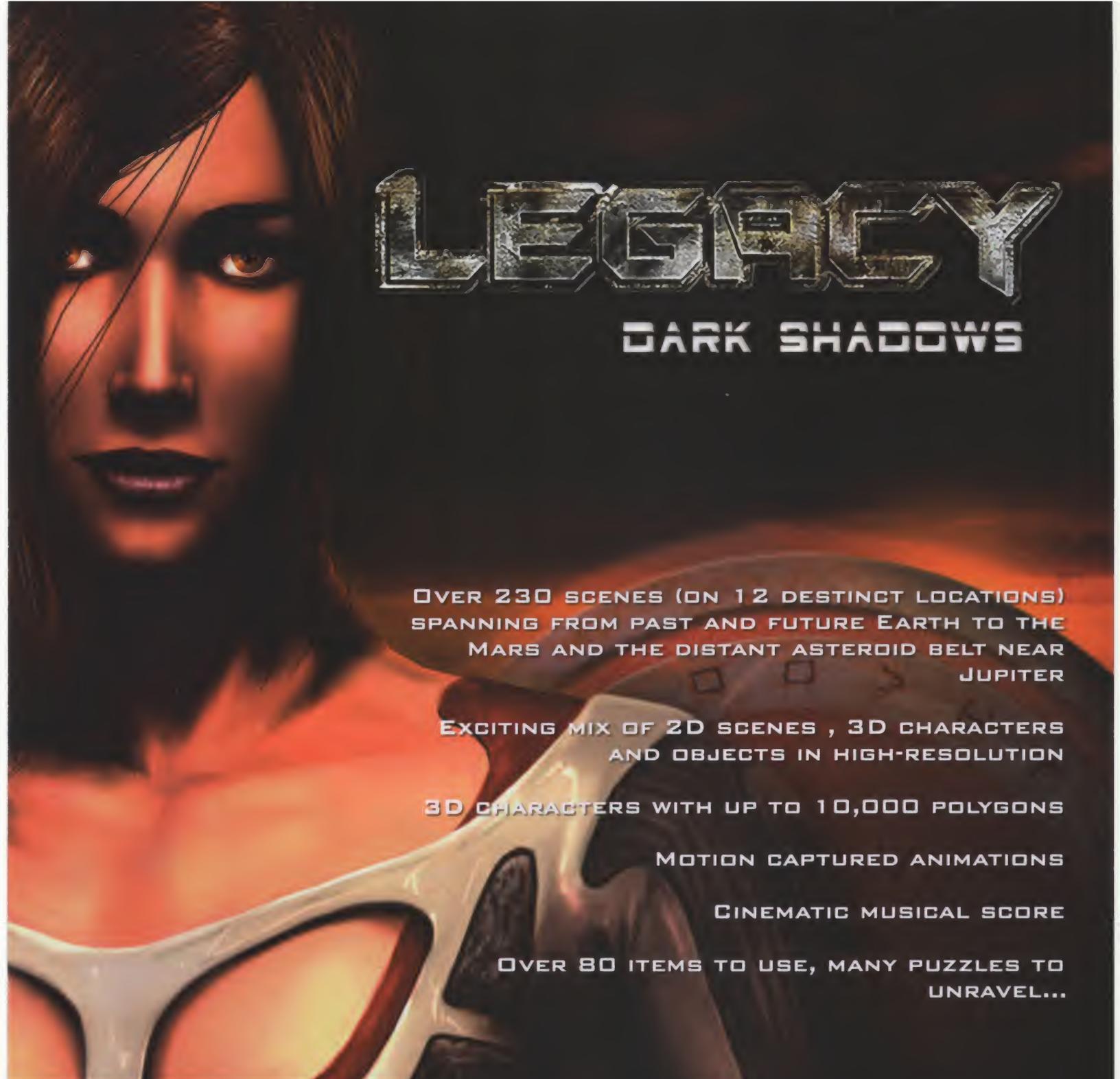
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STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

Massive review and demo of LucasArts' *Episode III* shooter!

One Tough SOB

You might have heard that after swearing blind that I'd never enter a MMOG, I was recently seduced into the *World Of Warcraft* and *EverQuest II* betas. Well, thankfully I've managed to get out, battered but not broken, and with one game to thank for my plucky escape – *Far Cry*.

Half-Life 2 and *Doom 3* might have stolen the headlines last year, but I'm pleading with anyone who hasn't played *Far Cry* to drop this mag and right the wrong. Now! Ignoring the minor flaws (sidekick Val and the occasional Trigen materialising out of thin air), *Far Cry* is a masterpiece – playing it through a second time merely confirmed what I already knew. Oh, and it's probably the best-looking game in the world to boot, especially if you're a sun worshipper.

Why am I saying this now? Because I think *Far Cry* was criminally neglected last year in favour of the bigger names. We're constantly crying out for developers to come in and challenge the hegemony of the elite, and Crytek did that and then some (for me it's a close thing as to whether it's the finest shooter of all time). And for what? To be ignored at award ceremonies and shunned at the stores? (OK, I'm exaggerating a little maybe, but you get my point.)

So, if you haven't already, go and buy *Far Cry*. And don't install the quicksave patch – it's for pussies. Yes, it's rock hard, but you're better than that. And before you ask, I'm not on commission, just a mission to right wrongs. One that doesn't involve delivering magical cutlery to dwarven kings...

Dave Woods
Editor

P66



COVER DISCS P138



■ DEMOS AND MOVIES!

Try out 2004's Game Of The Year with two levels of *Half-Life 2*, play out your *Star Wars* fantasies in *Republic Commando* and look after the little people in *The Settlers: Heritage Of Kings*. Plus *Will Of Steel* and *Hearts Of Iron III*.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

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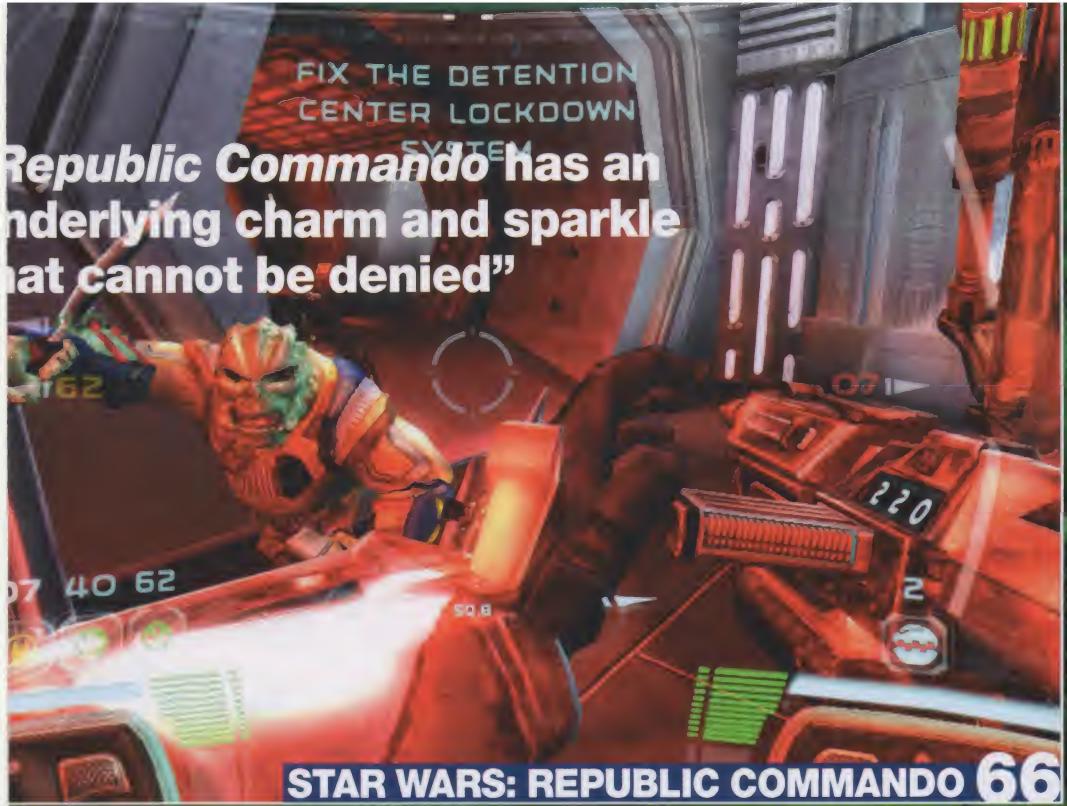
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TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (152), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: March 2, 2005. The winner of our Xmas Tiny Compo (150) was Mrs B. Strong from sunny Exeter. She wins a bunch of free stuff cultivated from underneath Will's desk, all because she knew that Christopher Lee is in EverQuest. Phew!

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!

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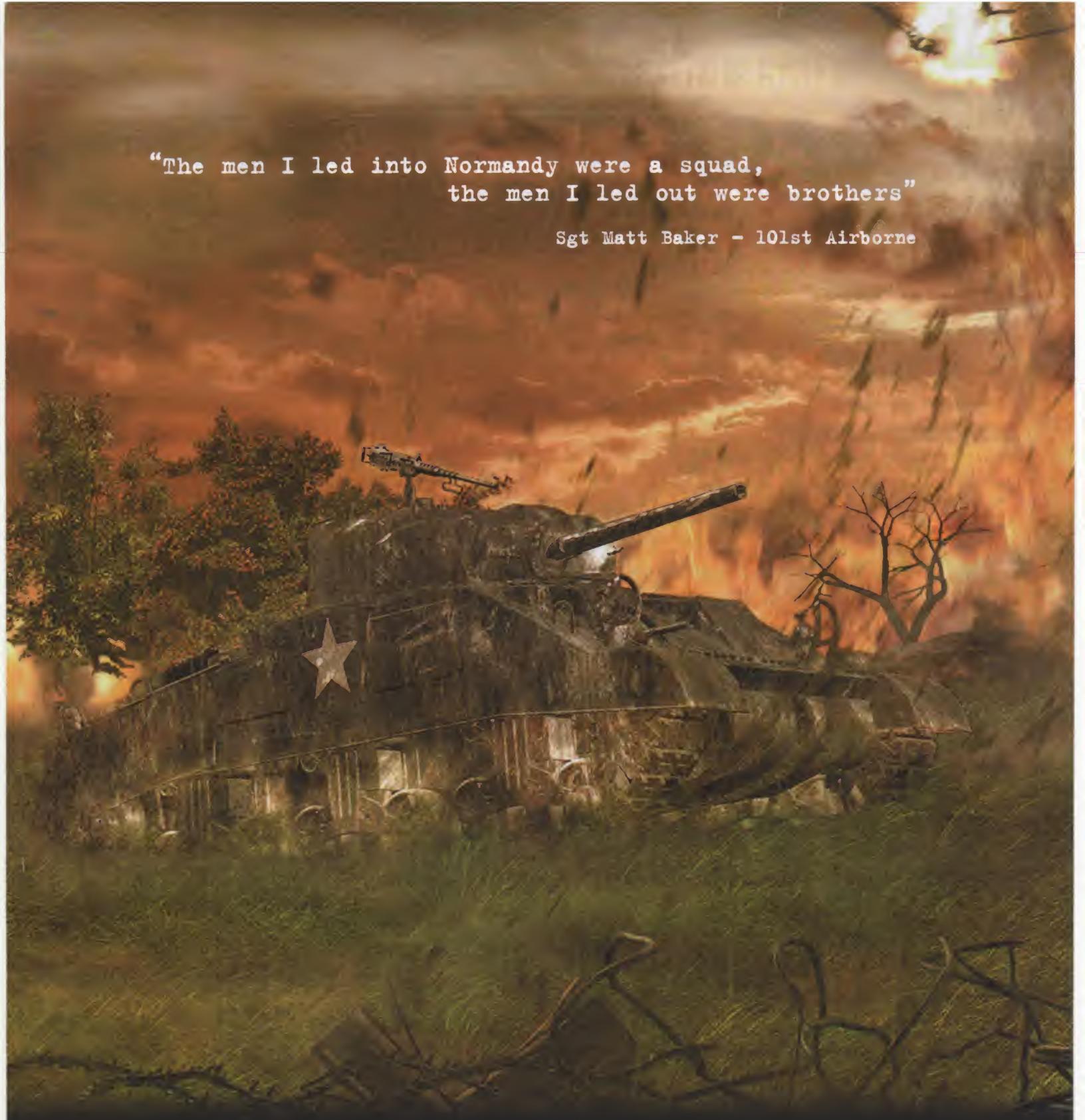
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the men I led out were brothers"

Sgt Matt Baker - 101st Airborne

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Back into time...

FIRST
Look!

AGE OF EMPIRES III



The heavyweight returns – with an extreme makeover

■ CONQUEROR OF THE NEW WORLD Dave Woods

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Microsoft
DEVELOPER Ensemble Studios
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q4 2005
WEBSITE www.ensemblestudios.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Bruce Shelly and the Age Of Empires franchise = RTS legends
- 16 million copies sold to date
- Stunning new 3D engine
- Realistic Havok physics
- 'Persistent' Home City feature

"The finely balanced campaign lacks the distasteful elements of the time. Slavery, anyone?"



Day and night cycles are purely cosmetic.

STRATEGY games have never claimed to be at the forefront of the graphical revolution. While each new FPS strives to win an audience through blinding science, the RTS has traditionally preferred to wow with complex gameplay – until now. Ensemble Studios has just announced the return of a legend, and one of its major improvements is the all-new 3D engine, with

dynamic shadows and lighting, support for Pixel Shader 3.0, and real-life physics, courtesy of the Havok system.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

The single-player campaign is stretched over 24 scenarios and each one has been designed to be played through in about 40 minutes, so you're looking at around 16 hours total. Details are still extremely sketchy, but Ensemble has revealed that one of these will involve you stopping your opponent from travelling through the Rocky Mountains by blocking his path with rubble from explosive charges. It's a good indication of the impact the new physics capabilities are going to have on the game, beyond the obligatory ragdolls.

The game starts in the year 1500. Playing a Scottish settler called Morgan Black, your job is to conquer America through exploration, establishing trade routes, forging alliances with the

12 Native American tribes and building armies. The story takes you through to 1850, just before the Civil War, and traces the lineage of Mr Black, through cut-scenes and in-game cinematics.

As well as a single-player skirmish, the full multiplayer game lets you select one of eight different European civilisations, including the French, Spanish and British. Each has different strengths and weaknesses, although rather than unfettered arrogance, Ensemble has decided to imbue the French with a powerful military and a better relationship with Native Americans. Go figure... You can win by crushing the enemy, but also by triggering other events, such as allying with four Native American tribes.

PLAYING AT HOME

The other major new feature that's been disclosed is the Home City. This is your base in Europe, which effectively 'levels up' as you progress through the game, providing you with new upgrades, and a visual representation of how you're faring. You can save a number of these Home Cities as characters (similar to a MMOG) and use the built-in matching system to find opponents online with a similar level of 'experience'.

Ensemble's buzzword though is 'fun'. In addition to playtesting to ensure the campaign is finely balanced, this is the excuse given for the no-show of the more distasteful elements of the time (slavery anyone?). The same goes for weather and day/night cycles, which will affect the way the game looks, but won't impact on gameplay. Keep an eye out for an in-depth preview soon.



Protect your cannons at all costs.



Downtown LA, circa 1575.



Stunning graphics and amazing levels of detail. To be honest, it's about time.

EUROPEAN UNION

As well as a single-player skirmish, you can play as one of eight European civilisations in multiplayer. Each has different characteristics – the Spanish, for example, start off with larger armies and get more support from their Home City.

HATS OFF

Ensemble has turned to Havok to provide real-life physics. This will impact on gameplay as well as enhancing the realism in the already spiffing graphics, with ragdolls, hats you can knock off and bodies that scatter when cannonballed. Sounds like fun.

NAUTICAL BUT NICE

Naval combat will feature in the game, but most of the 24 scenarios are played out on the ground, with a range of environments from mountains, through to deserts, forests and islands.



HOME IS BEST

The Home City is one of the major new features of *Age of Empires III*. Think of it as your character in a MMOG – as you progress through the game your European base levels up, providing you with new upgrades and the ability to kit your Home City out with stunning real-life architecture.

NICE WATER

Ensemble Studios wants *Age III* to be the best-looking RTS game ever. In the world. To that end it has employed a full-time programmer to work solely on the water effects. A job guaranteed to break the ice at parties.

**FIRST
Look!**

WWII was a warm-up...

CONFlict: GLOBAL TERROR

Near-future nightmares for the Desert Storm crew

HIDDEN SNIPER Jamie Seftor

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER SCi
DEVELOPER Pivotal
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE September
WEBSITE www.conflict.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the makers of *Conflict: Vietnam*
- Massively improved graphics and animation
- New female character
- Online multiplayer planned

"Aspires to be a PC big-hitter, and with Nazis in it, even Prince Harry might approve"



Rooftop sniping: fun for all the family.



"No, it's this way fool."



Beware the man with no face.

NAZIS, EH? If they're not providing inspiration for our monarchy's fancy dress costumes, they're busy being the most vicious and notorious bad guys in history. The latest PC game to get the evil jackbooted psychopaths into its sights is *Conflict: Global Terror*, the fourth title in the hugely successful console-centric franchise.

Set in the near future, *Global Terror* avoids using easy targets such as Islamic militants as its inspiration, and instead plumps for an almost James Bond-style plot. After being in hiding for many years, Nazis have re-emerged in South America and have begun funding terrorism around the world to destabilise western democracies in the hope of establishing a New Order. It's up to you and your squad of four counter-terrorist soldiers to quell the growing violence in six different locations including Kashmir, Columbia and Siberia.

Developer Pivotal has reintroduced the four Delta Force characters from *Desert Storm 1* and *2*, but after Foley goes MIA in the game, he's replaced with a brand new female character – a sniper called Carrie Sherman. She, along with Bradley (team leader), Jones (all-rounder) and Connors (heavy weapons), takes part in 15 missions that include infiltrating various buildings such as nuclear power stations and sarin gas plants, rescuing hostages and destroying terrorist cells.

WAR ON TERROR

The first big improvement from previous games is the graphics engine, which was looking rather tired in *Conflict: Vietnam* and has been almost rewritten from scratch. Characters' faces and clothing have much more detail, a new animation system has smoother movement and



Global Terror moves between gritty urban terrain to harsh outdoor locations.

there's full ragdoll physics. Your squad members can now climb ladders and jump over objects (pretty essential in the world of anti-terrorism I imagine) and have the ability to hack into computer systems to retrieve information.

From a tactical point of view, you can now delay orders to your soldiers for better co-ordinated attacks. In *Global Terror*, when you want to perform a room breach, you can send your sniper to watch the windows, make your other squad members guard another door and when the last order has been made, the team will all react at the same time to storm the enemy position. On-screen indicators have been added to point out useful items you can interact with, and there'll also be a stats screen after missions have been completed with

information such as number of headshots and civilians killed.

Another criticism of *Conflict: Vietnam* was that levels were very linear, with the level design forcing you to go through a very narrow corridor in the jungle environments. *Global Terror* promises multiple paths through missions, larger open spaces and a more realistic use of height for setting up snipers' nests or surveillance posts. Finally, the new *Conflict* will for the first time include online multiplayer modes, although what form these will take has yet to be revealed. All in all, while *Conflict: Global Terror* may not have the draw of a *SWAT 4* or *Star Wars: Republic Commando*, this squad-based tactical shooter certainly has ambitions to be a PC big-hitter. And with Nazis in it, even Prince Harry might approve. **PM**



Online multiplayer will be included for the first time.



"Hey, do you mind? I think he's really hurt..."



Celebrity Big Brother gets out of hand...

RPG? NO THANKS

The frustrating character development system from *Conflict: Vietnam* has now gone, so your squad will be fully trained and toolled-up right from the start.

PRETTY PICTURES

Multi-layered textures, smoother animation, ragdoll physics, better lighting and posh new camera moves mean *Global Terror* is the best-looking *Conflict* yet.

INTELLIGENT SOLDIERS?

Improved AI means that enemies can now duck down behind objects for cover, jump up onto ledges, climb ladders and run up stairways.

BIG GUNS

As the game is set 'the day after tomorrow', it allows Pivotal to include both real-world and experimental weapons such as sonic guns.

HACK ATTACK

Info now pops up on-screen to indicate objects such as computers you can interact with, or if you prefer, destroy with extreme force.

GIRL POWER

Conflict: Global Terror's new character is a female sniper called Carrie Sherman. She's built like a tank too.

BULLETIN

DEMOLITION



■ NEWS EDITOR Will Porter

▲ Game demos can be amazing. In fact, I'd go as far to say that had I never booted up the *Carmageddon* demo or bought the copy of *ZONE* that had *Deus Ex* on its cover disc, then I wouldn't be sitting here spouting shit at strangers for money.

It makes me angry then, when I play a demo that doesn't do a game justice. Prime offender this month is *Republic Commando* – a game that may have issues (and a rubbish ending that I didn't have space to mention in my review – but you know now), but remains a thoroughly enjoyable blast that had me excitedly poking the quickload key more than the majority of many recent games. (I was a lot more dignified with *Half-Life 2*.) Imagine my annoyance then, when I took the demo for a spin and discovered that the level the developer had chosen was short, dull and contained very few of the exciting nuggets of gameplay that I'd picked up on in my review. Are they crazy? Stop underselling your game!

Another notable offender in the naff demo league was *Tribes: Vengeance*, a game whose sales have failed to match its superbly-told story or gigantic, sumptuous levels. Instead of providing one of the amazing Mercury missions, the developer chose to construct an entirely new arena level that may have been fun, but didn't even hint at the fact that *Tribes* had moved on from its singularly multiplayer roots. Thankfully, someone somewhere has come to their senses and one of the greatest *Vengeance* missions has been released as a belated third demo – and I implore you to give it a whirl and realise its brilliance. It's on the DVD and it's a must-play. Anyway, that's it for now. I'm off to shoot some bad men. Bye...

RETURN OF THE WORM

ZONE SPEAKS TO TEAM 17'S MARTYN BROWN AND REFLECTS ON TEN YEARS OF CHAOS AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF *WORMS 4: MAYHEM*



The worms are looking good for their age.



2D is now a distant memory.

ONCE UPON a time, there was a game that made turn-based combat fun. As time passed it gained more and more old women, sheep and holy hand grenades. Then it became 3D. It had seamlessly integrated itself into computing history. Now, the announcement of *Worms 4: Mayhem* confirms that even at the game's tenth anniversary, there's still no end in sight for the *Worms* world party.

"Ten years ago, if I thought I'd still be talking about *Worms* in 2005 I'd have laughed at you," says Martyn Brown, the studio director at Team 17. "It's amazing really. The worm thing is almost like a part of the furniture here now. It was never intended to work out that way, but I guess we timed it just as the industry went hell-bent on franchise development. There's a saying that suggests you can be a victim of your own success – but the term 'victim' is hardly applicable given all that's gone before – especially with all that's about to hit with *Worms 4*."

Worms 4, recently migrating from Sega to the Codemasters stable, is apparently being taken back to its anarchist basics. "It's probably the title we really wanted *Worms 3D* to be, but never had the luxury of time and resources," explains Brown.

"It brings a much richer balance of play, plus two of the most keenly requested aspects of our fan base; you can customise your own worms and also make your own devious weapons." With inflatable scousers, poison arrows and a

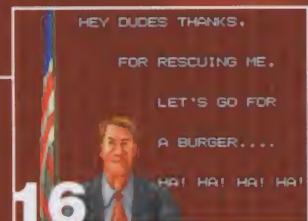
bovine blitz option that provides a bombing raid of cows, it looks like you're in for a familiarly surreal experience – not least with the game being spread out over five themed zones: Wild West, Arabian, Construction, Camelot and Jurassic. Animation and worm-interactivity have also been significantly upped, meanwhile, and Brown promises that issues with cameras, control and multiplayer that he felt bugged previous 3D releases have had far more attention paid to them this time around.

But how does it feel to be head of a development company that's been entangled in worms for an entire decade? "I think it's fair to say that it's been one mother of a

roller coaster ride," smiles Brown. "It's had massive highs and a few splashes in the water along the way. I've felt sick, been sick and worried sick, but ultimately never became sick of the game itself. Given that it's been ten years and we're still keen as mustard on making things better – that must say something." Roll on *Worms 5, 6 and 7* then...

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Team 17
- ETA: Q2 2005
- Website: www.team17.com





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PC ZONE CHARTS
Lovely, lovely charts

CLOCKING ON



TIMESHIFT – THE GAME THAT'LL ENCOURAGE YOU TO RE-RECORD, NOT FADE AWAY



As time goes by... with guns.



BULLET-TIME, Focus, Hyper Sensitivity, Adrenaline Mode, Hell-Time: so many phrases for exactly the same damn thing – but, whatever you call it, *TimeShift* has it in spades.

The new shooter from the now *Unreal*-bereft Atari, *TimeShift* has taken the bullet-time premise and run with it. Y'see besides the familiar *Matrix* slow-down, your hero will also be able to pause the action and even reverse it. Should you particularly enjoy a certain kill (or completely miss) you can suck the bullets back down your barrel, for example, and give your prey a painful sense of déjà-vu. Alternatively, say a bridge is blowing up with all the physical grace we know and love – pause the action and you'll be able to skip merrily between chunks of mid-air bridge.

So it looks like we're talking first-person *Max Payne* in the fourth dimension, although you may be surprised at the complexity of the time tricks you'll be able to play. If you destroy a crate placed next to enemy soldiers, crouch where it once stood and reverse time, you'll see the crate reforming around you – until you're completely surrounded by solid box and some fairly bemused guards.

Sounds pretty intriguing, eh? Don't let the fact that it's being made by *Will Rock* developer Saber Interactive put you off either – reports are suggesting that this one could be quite special.

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Saber Interactive
ETA: Q3 2005
Website: www.uk.atari.com



Murray the skull could have been recast in celluloid.



Come on Mr Lucas! Everyone likes pirates.

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP

Everyone keeping up oddly healthy lifestyles. Fags are out, jogging is in.



Becoming badminton buddies with a man who goes by the name of Diamond Valentine.

Prod ed Clare getting a new hoover that's like a Dyson but not a Dyson, bought at the 60 per cent off sale. You wouldn't believe the dust...



BAD COP

A set-up that gives Prez two keyboards, Will two mice and a nice IT bloke a nervous breakdown.

Jamie's squash court rage resulting in (another) racket being mercilessly destroyed and everyone getting quite concerned.

The eternal battle of Ms Suzy Wallace versus Steam reaches its fourth round. Could go either way.

Good Cop: Ethan 'Jake Hoyt' Hawke
Bad Cop: Denzel 'Alonzo Harris'
Washington from *Training Day*, the best film on telly over the Christmas holidays, according to our big, scary art department.

MONKEY ISLAND: THE MOVIE?

LUCASARTS FILM PROJECT UNCOVERED BY PLUCKY WEB BUCCANEERS

ONCE UPON a time, deep within Industrial Light & Magic, there were a group of people charged with the transfer of Lucas intellectual property from game to film. Concept sketches and pictures for the movie have recently surfaced on the website of one Tony Stacchi (a former ILM worker), and

discovered by fansite ScummBar.com, some of which were even painted in by the mighty Steve Purcell himself (who, among other achievements, created *Sam & Max*).

Due to fear of castration, ZONE can't print the sketches in question, although we strongly urge you to visit their home

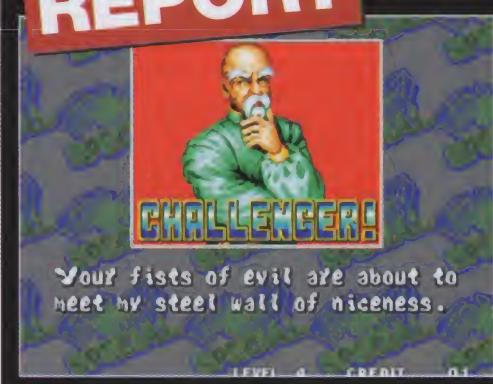
at www.stacchi.com. The project itself, entitled *The Curse Of Monkey Island* and perhaps based on the game of the same name, was killed in a gigantic reshuffle a few years ago. We'd like to think that, in these post-*Pirates Of The Caribbean* years, a renaissance could be possible. But we all know that it isn't. Shame.



LOST IN TRANSLATION

SPECIAL REPORT

Rubbish game localisations are tough to understand on many levels, but in 2005 developers are finally starting to break through the language barrier. All your base are belong to Pavel Barter, with or without a Jill sandwich



“THIS GUY are sick.” “But do you really are?” Sometimes it seems that there’s no cure for rubbish game dialogue other than an English GCSE and a swift uppercut with the stupid stick. The history of interactive entertainment is littered with nonsensical translations.

Dean Gregory of Outsource Media, localisation maestros behind such PC titles as *Football Manager 2005*, *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* and *Devastation*, has his own tale of woe. “We were handed a Japanese script which had been translated into English by Italians. It was absolutely incomprehensible. One of the characters spent ages looking for a key to the whorehouse, when it was meant to be the warehouse. One phrase that confused us was the ‘throwing-stick exploding bomb’. This turned out to be a hand-grenade.”

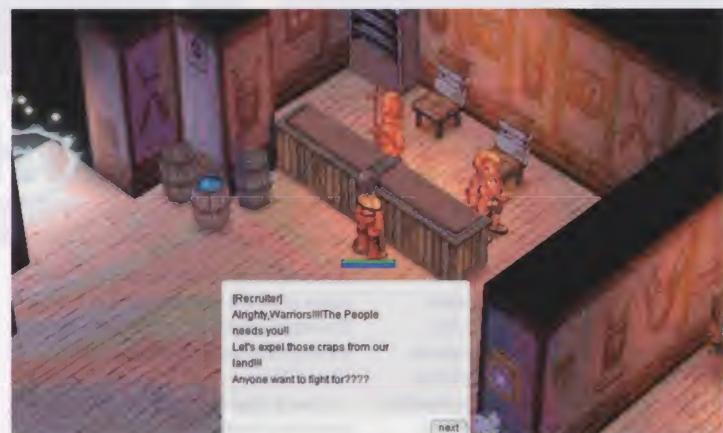
With international markets now commanding around 40 per cent of total sales, publishers and developers are coming to the realisation that car boot translations won’t cut the mustard. This means paying close attention to localisation issues during the development process, ensuring there’s enough code

memory to allow voice and text expansion. Fail to cater for every spoken taste and some regions go ahead and overdub their own. Funcom’s sumptuous adventure *The Longest Journey* was translated into 11 languages, explains product director Jørgen Tharaldsen.

YODA SPEAK

“Besides our own efforts, there are three Russian versions and a Chinese version based on the pirated Italian version,”

explains Tharaldsen. “There’s a lot of work required in order to fully localise games. In *Dreamfall (The Longest Journey’s 2005 sequel)*, it’s not just a matter of the text, which is simple enough, but we also need to find actors for a multitude of languages. This is normally conducted through local distributors or publishers. We’re not as involved in this process and are mostly putting our resources into making the English version as good as it can possibly be.”



Are dodgy translations finally a thing of the past?



The Longest Journey suffered from many unauthorised translations.

"This localisation malarkey is enough to bring on a migraine, which is why most developers just hand the job over"

Like love, *Pac-Man* and other two-bit arcade classics spoke an international language. Similarly, some games and genres require less multinational work than others. Ubisoft, creators of *Splinter Cell* and *Far Cry*, has an entire localisation team at its disposal. The department's project manager, Jean-Sébastien Ferey, explains that a strategy or sports title is faster to localise since there is scant need for voice-acting or in-game text.

"On the other hand, an action game takes more time as there's more context and the characters need their own identity. An MMO will be longer still due to the amount of constraints and the sheer amount of text. It can take between one to six months, sometimes more. Because after the translation, recordings and post-processing, there is the integration and linguistic testing to take into account..."

This localisation malarkey is enough to bring on a migraine, which is why most

developers just decide to hand the job over to the experts. Kamil Metrak of Polish outsource company L'Art says that alongside spoken and written language requirements, graphics sometimes need to be repainted (since text can be integrated into imagery), manuals reprinted, and additionally, the finished product fully tested.

You say tomato and I say, um, tomato. You say potato and I say... It's a weird

WAFFLY VERSATILE



ZERO WING

"In AD 2101. War was beginning. What happen? Somebody set us up the bomb. We get signal. What! Main screen turn on. It's you!! How are you gentlemen. All your base are belong to us!" George W Bush would be proud.



HALF-LIFE

In Italy, *Half-Life*'s Blast Pit episode was translated as 'Containment Pit', while Residue Processing became 'The Remaining Part Of The Process'. Which makes it sound like some kind of philosophical conundrum.

RESIDENT EVIL

"You were almost a Jill sandwich!" Barry is joking about his partner's scrape with death but from here it sounds like dirty talk. (All makes sense later with "You, the master of unlocking, take it with you.")

and wonderful world we live in, and even content is altered for some territories. A product shipped to the UK will sell better with a dance soundtrack; in Australia, it's a rock soundtrack. As for Germany, strict violence-censoring laws meant that *Quake*, *Soldier Of Fortune*, *Carmageddon*, *Grand Theft Auto* and more, had scenes cut or the claret removed in favour of greenish gunk. In Germany's version of *Command & Conquer*, enemy soldiers were turned into robotic droids. Something that's still offensive if you're a member of Westlife, mind.

LISTEN UP

Dodgy translation still occurs in the occasional Eastern title but on the whole the industry has woken up and smelt the bubble. *Half-Life 2* was shipped simultaneously in English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Korean, Thai and Japanese. In spring 2005, *Dark Age Of Camelot* will launch in Spain, Italy and Korea (it's already available in English, French, German and Italian); each localised version of the game containing more than two million words of text, equivalent to 16 paperback novels.

"In *Ghost Recon 2*, we made it a point to include several international specialists from Special Forces in France, Germany, and Britain to give the game a more international flavour," continues Heather Maxwell Chandler. "These characters appear in the cinematics and accompany the players in some of their missions, so it's more appealing than just controlling a US Special Forces team."

Will there ever come a time when games provide different storylines and characters for each of their territories? "That could be a possibility in the long-term," contends Ubisoft's Jean-Sébastien Ferey. "If the game is especially popular, I don't see why not," adds Maxwell Chandler. Welcome news indeed, unless your only language is Welsh in which case you're still f**ked.



It isn't just the menu screens that need alteration...

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

A PERVERTED sex game has been pulled off shelves after it was revealed that it contains explicit footage of an underage girl's mammary glands. Highbrow trivia quiz *The Guy Game* rewards successful players with video clips of teenagers exposing their breasts. The footage was taken in America during Spring Break, an annual tradition whereby intoxicated youngsters become sexually ostentatious. One of the girls was only 17, thereby rendering the content illegal. Her status as a minor also negates any consent she may have given for the material to be used. The girl claims to have suffered humiliation, embarrassment and shame as a result of her appearance in the game, and is bringing a lawsuit against developer **Top Heavy Studios** and publisher **Gathering**, as well as **Sony** and **Microsoft**, whose consoles host the game. The lawsuit claims: "The plaintiff is still a teenager and wishes to attend college, develop her career and be active in her community and church." Completely coincidentally, this story coincides with the **PC release** of the game.

Another game to fall under the censor's sword is Sega's **Football Manager 2005**, which has been banned in China. The controversy stems from the depiction of the Taipei region of Taiwan, the Hong Kong Macau region and Tibet as separate countries rather than parts of China. The **Chinese Ministry of Culture** has announced that the game poses a threat to the country's "sovereignty and territorial integrity," and that the government will investigate, confiscate and punish websites, computer software markets and Internet cafes, who disseminate or sell *Football Manager 2005*. Ironically, the game has yet to be released in China, and all complaints were from gamers playing pirated copies. A **Sega spokesman** said: "We are reviewing the contents along with our local partner, Ubisoft. The press release appears to relate to an English language product which is not intended for release in China, and appears to have reached China through piracy or unauthorised means." Theiving scum.

"The girl claims to have suffered humiliation, embarrassment and shame as a result of her appearance in the game"



Bling modding for bling people.



Chelmsford by night.

SYNDICATE WARS

RACE CARS AND WIN LOOSE LADIES IN STREET RACING SYNDICATE

WITH **JUICED'S** release date being delayed until May, *Need For Speed Underground 2* has looked pretty happy out in the lead of the racing games, racking up a number one spot in the charts over Christmas. Now, however, Namco looks set to jab its dipstick firmly into the lucrative genre with *Street Racing Syndicate*.

Set on the streets of Miami, LA and Philadelphia, it's got the motors for it, with over 40 licensed cars lining up at the start line. The many and varied

automotive parts from 15 real-world manufacturers mean you can tune and modify your car from street sleeper to tricked-out monster machine.

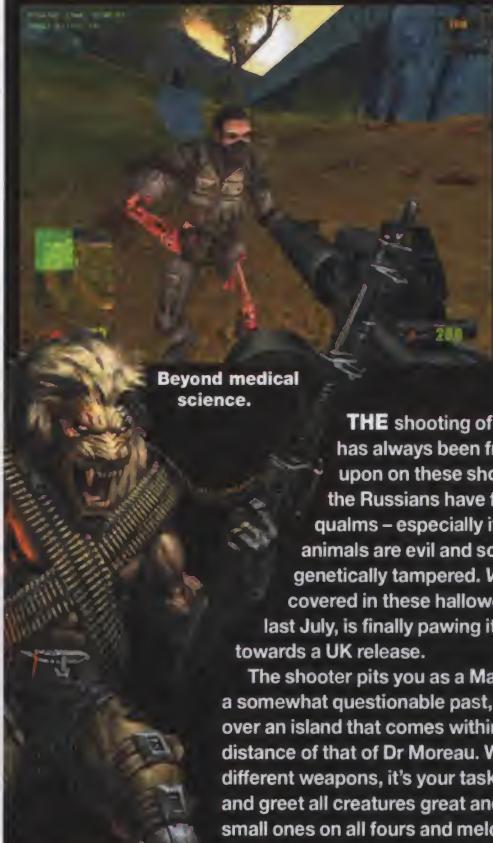
But what's going to make SRS stand out from EA's highly tuned and lovingly crafted racer? For starters, your beloved set of wheels is prone to damage and any repairs will have to be paid for out of your own wallet. Plus, besides the expected prizes of cash and respect, you also get the chance to compete for pink ownership

slips and a bevy of butt-shaking beauties who you can be misogynistic with. The driving's also been enhanced by the ever-present chance of the rozzers arriving to try and split up the party, and it'll be up to you whether you leg it or face the music. Respect and bling.

- Publisher: HIP Interactive
- Developer: HIP Interactive
- ETA: March
- Website: srs.namco.com

BEAST WARS

KITTEN-PUMMELLING EXTRAVAGANZA SET FOR A UK RELEASE



Beyond medical science.



Bonio, sir?

THE shooting of animals has always been frowned upon on these shores, but the Russians have far fewer qualms – especially if the animals are evil and somewhat genetically tampered. *Vivisector*, covered in these hallowed pages last July, is finally pawing its way towards a UK release.

The shooter pits you as a Marine with a somewhat questionable past, trekking over an island that comes within litigious distance of that of Dr Moreau. With 18 different weapons, it's your task to meet and greet all creatures great and small – small ones on all fours and melded with

machinery, and great ones on their hind legs with machine guns.

Bears with bombs, vultures with helicopter blades attached, rhinos mixed with steamrollers, leopards with flamethrowers – the list is endless, as are the number of body parts that you can individually blow away. It's not a game that's going to impress with technology or innovation, but it is one of the fabled few games that enables you to fight giant monkeys. For this, at least, it's welcome.

- Publisher: Brigades
- Developer: Action Forms
- ETA: March
- Website: www.vivisector.com

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

ROME: TOTAL WAR ENGINE MEETS THE TROJAN WAR IN THE REVAMPED NEW SERIES OF BBC2'S TIME COMMANDERS

SEXED UP, revamped and with a brand new presenter in the form of ever-enthusiastic *Top Gear* presenter Richard Hammond, *Time Commanders* has returned. Ever looking for the latest scoop on Creative Assembly and its beautiful war machine, we got in touch with studio marketing manager Ian Roxburgh and Angus Cameron, the *Time Commanders* series producer, for the lowdown.

The show again puts teams in the general's seat of major historical battles, with this series providing a variety of over-enthusiastic vicars, gruff military men and stressed family units overseeing many and varied massacres and crushing defeats.

"I would hope that viewers will think that this series is very different," states Cameron. "We've streamlined the studio a lot more so that it has more of a true narrative right the way through. It should feel much more coherent." A fact ably demonstrated by the removal of much of the waffle from the start of episodes, and the introduction of a

quickfire skirmish that sets up the action and quickly acclimatises teams to the bizarre set-up of the monitors and cameras that surround them.

But how about the *Total War* engine? "The engine you saw in the old episodes was pre-alpha code," explains Ian. "So although it still looked cool, it was way earlier than anything that went into the box. This series was filmed just after we finished the game so it was actually using the finished code. It comes across on the show really well – it's a massive upgrade in the quality of the CG."

The battles have been somewhat jazzed up along with the studio, with more variety, less nerdy analysis and far more spectacle. One episode in particular focuses on a notable Alexander the Great skirmish that featured the greatest army of War Elephants of all time. Elsewhere, there are Vikings versus Saxons at Stamford Bridge and (strangely enough) even the Battle of Troy gets a look in.

"We created new models and added a few tweaks to the code to

facilitate different kinds of weaponry," explains Ian. "We thought that we'd have a bit of fun. We'd got plenty of decent historical battles that we'd used in both series – so why not do something different?"

Whether or not you'll ever get to play through these battles at home is yet to be seen (one glimpse of the new *Time Commanders* battles show you what prime expansion pack fodder is covered here), although should they ever appear in game form it's doubtful that you'll be able to use the same bizarre tactics as some *Time Commanders* teams.

"There was a team of political consultants – we called them spin-doctors," recalls Angus. "The team consisted of a guy and three girls, and the two girls who ended up being the captains came in with a strategy. Number one on their plan was to flirt like mad with the computer operators. They cut their T-shirts really low, so when they leaned over they... Well, not to put too fine a point on it, they were distracting the operators. The guys were like putty in their hands." Tactics the Romans would have probably approved of.



The men employed to change history.

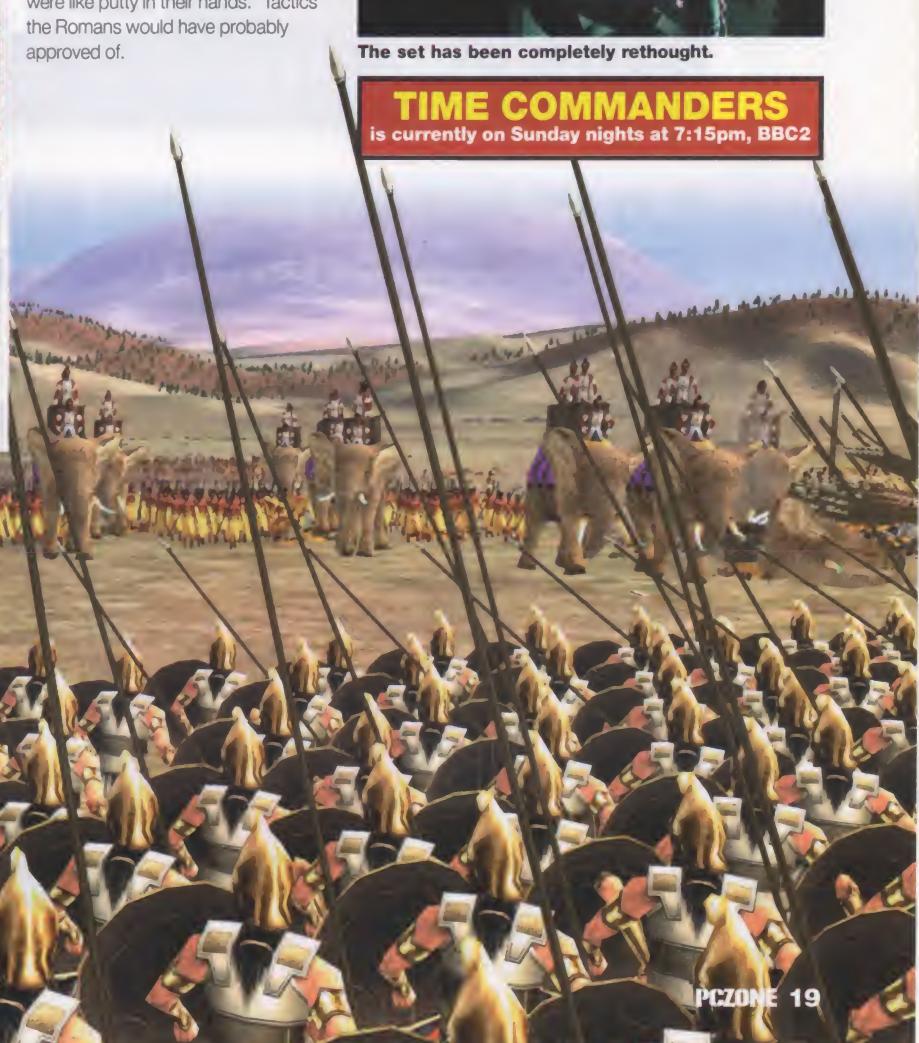


Top Gear's Richard Hammond helms the series.



The set has been completely rethought.

TIME COMMANDERS
is currently on Sunday nights at 7:15pm, BBC2



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**ON SALE
JAN
27**





FREEPLAY

Some of the best things in life are free! Anthony Holden's got the proof...

FREEPLAY is a new section in PC ZONE dedicated to the best free things you can do with your PC that don't involve naked ladies. The Internet is positively riddled with free games content, be it freeware, open source, abandonware, home-brews, webgames or emulation. And while a lot of it's junk, we're going to do our damnedest to sort the shit from

the Shinobi and bring you the best of gratis gaming every month. Because Freeplay cares...

This month, we're focusing on the retro remakes scene, but there'll be a different mix of stuff every month – some new, some old, depending on what's impressed us. You may never have to buy another game again...

F RELOADED

Better than the originals: classic games rewritten for modern PCs

When it comes to nostalgia, there are many levels of dedication. Some reminisce about their favourite Speccy moments as they sink into a beer-tinted funk; others relive their experiences through emulation. On a whole other level are the dedicated hobbyists who spend

their time painstakingly recreating old games from scratch. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the scene is at its most active in the UK, where it's supported by website Retro Remakes (www.remakes.org). For the past couple of years the site has run a competition to choose the best of the

year's crop and shower them with prizes.

The results of the 2004 compo are just in, and there's some genuinely fantastic stuff on offer. You can get them all from the Retro Remakes website, but to get you started here are our impressions of two of the top picks...



LEGEND OF SHADOW

■ Developer: Darthlupi Games ■ Website: www.darthlupi.com

This remake of Taito's dimly remembered 1985 coin-op *The Legend Of Kage* took top honours at Retro Remakes 2004, taking away over a grand's worth of prizes and the honour of being the year's best game.

And you won't find any arguments here. The game is impressive throughout, with an excellent sense of style and faultless production values. A frantic side-scrolling affair (right to left scrolling, fittingly), the game casts you as a legendary ninja out to rescue a kidnapped princess, with only swords, shuriken and the occasional power-up to aid you. The action is bewildering and furious, as wave upon wave of leaping ninja and fire-breathing priests descend upon you from all directions – but with a bit of practice it becomes surprisingly skillful. The characters may be tiny to accommodate their exaggerated leaping abilities, but this is nonetheless an elegant and enjoyable game that definitely deserves a download.



PUSH PUSH PENGUIN

■ Developer: Black Cat
■ Website: www.armyoftrolls.co.uk/penguins

Not all remakes follow the same development ethos. Some, like *Legend Of Shadow*, use the original game merely as a rough blueprint. Others, such as *Push Push Penguin*, are more to do with exact replication, buffing up graphics and sound but leaving the gameplay sacred.

In this case the holy text was *Pengo*, Sega's legendary penguin-themed coin-op from 1982. *PPP* seems identical at first, but further investigation soon reveals a raft of subtle enhancements: new power-ups, new enemies, even a combo system of sorts. All of this meshes beautifully with the original design, the superb level of polish leaving no room for error.

Push Push Penguin only managed fourth at the Retro Remakes awards, but for our money it definitely deserved a spot on the podium. If you've got a fondness for penguins, seek it out immediately.



TOP 5... NINJA GAMES

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1 | TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS (PSone)
Emulate it with: ePSXe www.epsxe.com |
| 2 | MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON (N64)
Emulate it with: 1964 1964emu.emulation64.com |
| 3 | THE LAST NINJA (Commodore 64)
Emulate it with: VICE www.viceteam.org |
| 4 | SHINOBI III (Sega Genesis)
Emulate it with: XEGA xega.emucamp.com |
| 5 | TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (Coin-op)
Emulate it with: MAME www.mame.net |

GOLDEN OLDIE: GTA 2

Download from:
www.rockstargames.com
Rockstar is one of the few enlightened developers that gives its older games away for free. *GTA 2* is the latest, and it's the perfect antidote for the four-month wait until *San Andreas* drops. It's also a damn fine game in its own right. Respect!



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



CAPOEIRA FIGHTER 3

www.spiritonin.com/capoeirafighter

Dancing and fighting, it seems, are natural bedfellows. Not only does one inevitably lead to the other in many of the UK's less reputable nightspots, but the two combine to excellent effect in the Brazilian martial art of capoeira. In the games world, capoeira is best known through the breakdance stylings of Eddy Gordo (*Tekken*), but the style is also the

basis for a web-based fighting series called *Capoeira Fighter* – arguably the best web-based beat 'em up ever.

The series is now in its third incarnation, and you can now play a free 'preview' version on the Net (though it seems there will be a more complete version available to purchase at a later date). As it stands, *CF3* is one of the most impressive and comprehensive Shockwave games we've ever seen, offering a 2D beat 'em up experience to rival many arcade efforts.

The game features a full complement of fighters, each with a unique and plentiful array of moves, combos and special attacks. Graphics and animations are excellent throughout, and there's an inventive mix of game modes to keep you busy, all playable head-to-head or against the CPU.

Visit the developer site at spiritonin.com for a full list of character attributes and special attacks – you'll have two left feet without them.



DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Besides our own games I try to play as many new games as I can. I prefer strategy/tactical games, but don't have a favourite as I'm always finding new ones to play.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?

It was probably *Freelancer*. Most of today's games don't have the depth to entertain me for that long.

What is your favourite game of all time?

Shogun: Total War – it's simply the best.

What are you most proud of in your career?

It would have to be *Battlestations: Midway*. As a developer, you should always try to do better and better. Your last work should always be something you're proud of – otherwise you're doing something wrong.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

Obviously I respect all the industry big names – Sid Meier, Will Wright, Peter Molyneux... Most of all, I admire designers who show real creativity and aren't afraid to invent totally new ideas.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

PCs are the key tools behind the continual evolution and reform of videogaming technology. Without the PC it would be significantly more difficult to get new and talented developers into the industry.

What is your company's philosophy?

That's simple: create good games through fresh, new game ideas rather than cloning the big titles. A Mithis game must be innovative, deep and very atmospheric.

What's the best thing about your job?

Coming up with game concepts. It's also great when a game starts to work – when the game starts being a game rather than a computer program.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Projects are so long. You've got to wait a long time for feedback from the only legitimate jury: the players themselves.

What are you working on at the moment?

Battlestations: Midway, as well as another title we haven't announced yet.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

In terms of long-term technological advancement, virtual characters – that are able to react and behave with their own memories and motivations.

YEAR OF THE ZOMBIE

PEOPLE THAT DIE DON'T JUST DISAPPEAR – EVEN WHEN YOU BURY THEM. THEY POPULATE COMPUTER GAMES INSTEAD



Roll call of the dead: *George Romero Presents..., Stubbs and Possession*.



BEING DEAD has just become fashionable for the first time since the 13th century and the outbreak of the bubonic plague. Already in the hot seat for corpse reanimation is Stubbs the Zombie – Bungie founder Alex Seropian's mischievous eponymous flesh-eater, as well as American McGee's *George Romero Presents* range that we reported on two months ago. Now it looks like Stubbs and the 'Of The Dead' games (themselves recently picked up by publishers Hip Games)

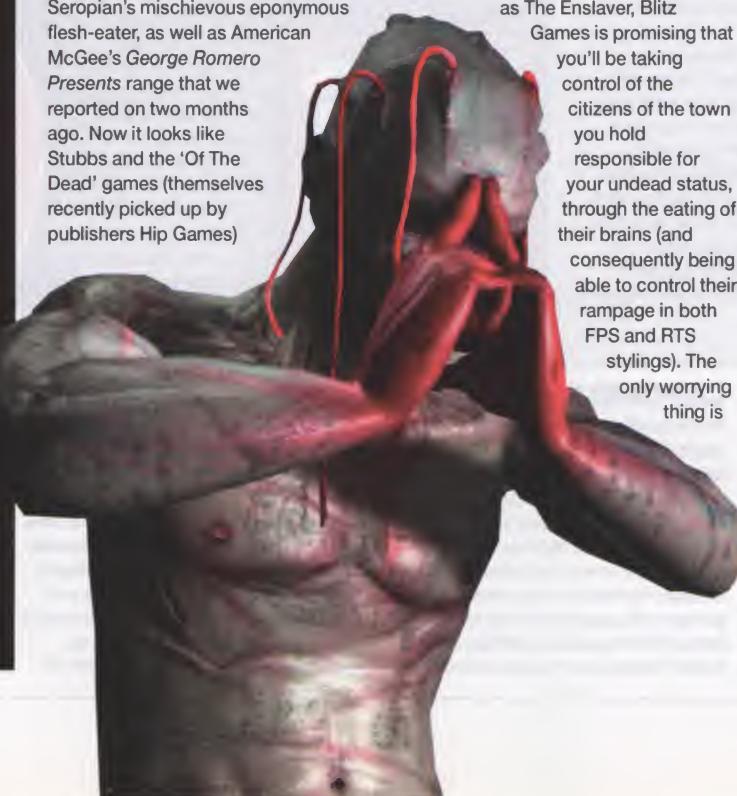
are no longer solitary in their pursuit of fresh brains.

Possession is another game announced for next-gen machines and a PC release, that'll feature you as the rotten trouble-maker himself. Playing as The Enslaver, Blitz

Games is promising that you'll be taking control of the citizens of the town you hold responsible for your undead status, through the eating of their brains (and consequently being able to control their rampage in both FPS and RTS stylings). The only worrying thing is

that Blitz is the same company that brought us *Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Horse Rescue*, but the premise is intriguing enough for us to overlook that. The fact that should your zombie's head be blown off, he can simply pick it up and carry it probably helps too.

The rumour mill has also spat out the fact that Dan O'Bannon, who wrote the script to Ridley Scott's seminal *Alien* movie and directed *Return Of The Living Dead*, is working on a zombie game that's been touted to various publishers – including Ubisoft. So what with zombies (amongst other personifications of evil) making the usual, expected cameos in other forthcoming horror games (*Doom 3: Resurrection Of Evil*, *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth* and *Cold Fear* to name but three) it seems that shuffling slowly and moaning is in, and running and screaming is very much out.



ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

CLOSER THAN CLOSE

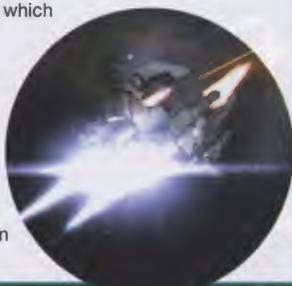
The good patriotic chaps at Destineer have announced that *Close Combat: First to Fight*, their ultra-realistic Marine squad shooter, will come packaged with a co-op play mode. This fabled mode,



perennially ignored by developers, will have you working through the entire single-player campaign with up to three buddies, either online or over a LAN. Hoorah!

OOH, WOLFY

Fans of *Homeworld* and *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident* may well be intrigued by *Star Wolves*, a game that combines their space-play with a basic role-play system that'll have you building up a team of six ships with which you can plunder the galaxy. Another proffering from the Russian homeland, we're yet to see whether *Star Wolves* will sink, swim or hover slightly – we'll be getting our paws on it later this month.



Gadzoobs!



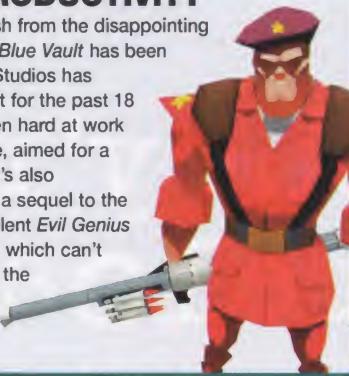
SUFFER CONSEQUENCES

The *Suffering 2* has been announced by Midway and even though a PC release hasn't been confirmed, we reckon that we shouldn't be far behind console gamers when they take Torque through the motions this autumn. *The Suffering: Ties That Bind* finds our blood-splattered hero back home in Baltimore, and it's promised that the ethereal Dr Killjoy will be making a return – as will 15 new creatures and a bucket-load of violence.



ELIXIR OF PRODUCTIVITY

Fresh from the disappointing revelation that *Blue Vault* has been canned, Elixir Studios has announced that for the past 18 months it's been hard at work on a new game, aimed for a 2006 release. It's also confirmed that a sequel to the uniformly excellent *Evil Genius* is in the works, which can't help but excite the villain in you. Mwaaa-haaa... Etc.



"In the early 1940s Japan learned an important lesson – 'Let the sleeping giant lie.' We may not react swiftly, but when we do it's with unstoppable force. We have incontrovertible proof you did something illegal. The Army is angry, and we're coming for you."

Uncle Sam responds to America's Army haxx0rs the only way he knows how.

"A momentous day: Louis (aged three years, four months) has today completed his first computer game unaided. It was, of course, the 1981 Atari VCS classic, Adventure. He killed two dragons, managed to get through the maze and bring home the chalice without any help from me (apart from the odd "No you twat, go left!"). A little genius!"

An email from ZONE stalwart Richie Shoemaker reveals that he is rearing his first-born as a carbon copy of himself.

NOT SOON ENOUGH

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS COMING TO PC. WORLD EXPLODES IN JOY

YOU'VE BEEN a good little PC gamer and resisted the lure of the PlayStation. You've put your fingers in your ears while your friends sit in the pub discussing, "The time that my girlfriend wouldn't sleep with me

because I was too fat, so I stole her car and had sex with a prostitute in her back garden." You've done your best to save yourself for the PC release. Well June is slated to be the month that ends your misery.

A simultaneous Xbox and PC release is the only scrap of information proffered by Rockstar, and any additional gameplay bar mouse-control and better graphics is deemed unlikely by experts (that's us, that is). However, from what we've all heard we could be looking at the prime contender for the Game of the Year. Roll on summer.



Set in California, made in Scotland, adored all over the planet.

Publisher: Rockstar Developer: Rockstar
ETA: June Website: www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas/

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Search For a Game

Got the greatest game idea since *Pong*? Come and put it to the ultimate test - PC ZONE's Search For A Game...



And that's the end of that chapter! Yes, this month sees the final entry in our Search For A Game. We've had highs, we've had lows, we've had middling non-committal shrugs of indifference. Our judges have hailed from the rooftops and wept with despair. But we've made it. The end is nigh. Just one final entry before the Grand final, this from Stefan Walker of Whitby, North Yorkshire. It seems as fitting a way to end as any with...

"GTA meets every possible game in a futuristic style"



Something wicked this way comes as Hermione teaches Tommy to spell.

SURVIVOR: WORLD DOMINATION

THIS GAME takes place on a futuristic Earth, with hover-cars, laser guns, jets and even a rebuilt Mars base destroyed in *Doom*. You can access every vehicle and meet game characters. Weapons range from a standard X-1000 laser gun to the JetX, which can get rid of the strongest foes. You play as Carlo (who wants to rescue the stars), or as Siphiroth (who wants

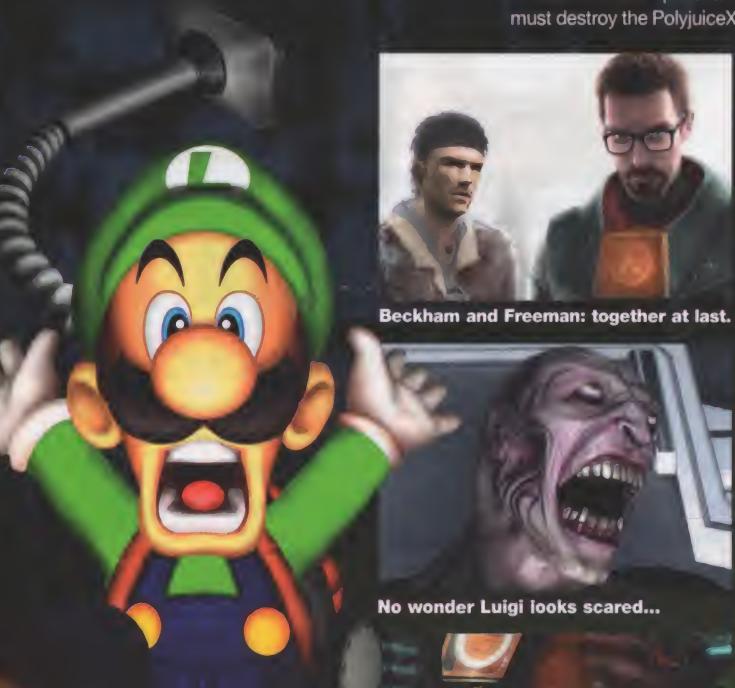
the stars for himself), taking two very different paths.

Mario and Luigi are angry that they're no longer the kids' number one game, and so recruit the likes of Trigens to eliminate the gaming world. Meet the likes of Donkey Kong (he's a 'barrel' of laughs), David Beckham (he really is stupid) and Gordon Freeman (Boredom Gayman) and so on. You can never trust one game character.

Here's an example of a mission. Playing as Carlo, you must destroy the PolyjuiceX machine (made by Hermione

Granger, who was tortured by Sauron into making it). Drive to Mario's headquarters and sneak your way in. Kill the orcs, eliminate the monsters created by PolyjuiceX and destroy the machine. See Mario and Luigi's plans for world domination.

Gameplay is from a third-person perspective. There are 20 missions, plus many mini-games to celebrate years of great videogaming.

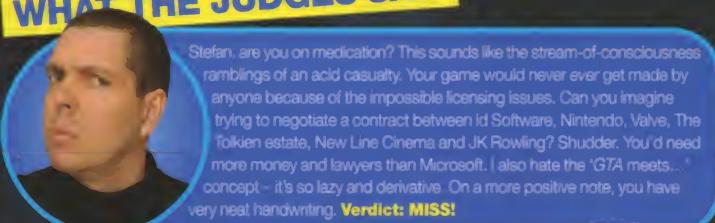


Beckham and Freeman: together at last.

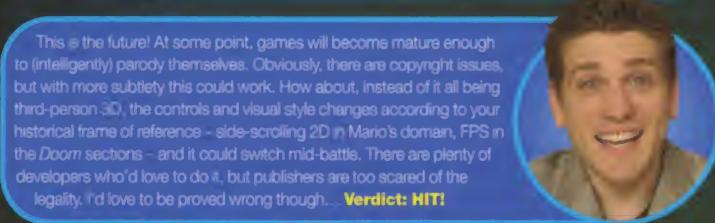
No wonder Luigi looks scared...

The most insane game ever?

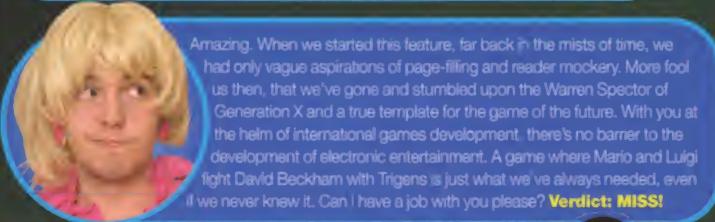
WHAT THE JUDGES SAY



Stefan, are you on medication? This sounds like the stream-of-consciousness ramblings of an acid casualty. Your game would never ever get made by anyone because of the impossible licensing issues. Can you imagine trying to negotiate a contract between Id Software, Nintendo, Valve, The Tolkien estate, New Line Cinema and JK Rowling? Shudder. You'd need more money and lawyers than Microsoft. I also hate the 'GTA meets...' concept - it's so lazy and derivative. On a more positive note, you have very neat handwriting. **Verdict: MISS!**



This is the future! At some point, games will become mature enough to (intelligently) parody themselves. Obviously, there are copyright issues, but with more subtlety this could work. How about, instead of it all being third-person 3D, the controls and visual style changes according to your historical frame of reference - side-scrolling 2D in Mario's domain, FPS in the *Doom* sections - and it could switch mid-battle. There are plenty of developers who'd love to do it, but publishers are too scared of the legality. I'd love to be proved wrong though... **Verdict: HIT!**



Amazing. When we started this feature, far back in the mists of time, we had only vague aspirations of page-filling and reader mockery. More fool us then, that we've gone and stumbled upon the Warren Spector of Generation X and a true template for the game of the future. With you at the helm of international games development, there's no barrier to the development of electronic entertainment. A game where Mario and Luigi fight David Beckham with Trigens is just what we've always needed, even if we never knew it. Can I have a job with you please? **Verdict: MISS!**

"Well there you go then. Nice try Stefan, but no cigar. Satire truly is dead. Unlike Search For A Game of course, which next month sees our Grand Final in which you get to vote for your favourite of the series. Don't! Miss! It!"



CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

How does it feel to be on your own? With no direction home. Like a complete unknown. Like a rolling stone. Like a page of charts

ChartTrack

TOP 10



Our main gripe about *The Sims* is that we have to keep on writing about it. Every month. Relentlessly. If only there was some way of screening out purchases made by the elderly, misguided and foolish then, maybe one day, our lot would improve.



Legend tells of a game that had 'sure-fire hit' engraved on it ever since the public were first exposed to a Balrog. With a dash of C&C magic and the world's favourite fantasy world as its setting, it's another reason to worship Peter Jackson as a bearded god.



The best thing out of Rome ever, barring pretty girls on scooters and many and varied pictures of Jesus, *Rome: Total War* continues to amaze strategy buffs and armchair gamers alike. They may have eaten voles and dormice, but they sure were good at fighting.



Now there's a patch for (most) of *Bloodlines'* eccentricities, you'd be mad if you weren't even tempted into its hub-based underworld. It's got its issues, but with time and nurture it isn't long before you realise it's got you hooked and won't let go.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	▲ THE SIMS 2	EA	82%
2	▲ FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA	90%
3	NEW LOTR: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA	91%
4	▼ HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES	97%
5	▼ MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA	79%
6	▼ ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION	93%
7	- ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI	79%
8	▲ ZOO TYCOON 2	MICROSOFT	55%
9	▼ NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA	84%
10	▼ VAMPIRE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION	86%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Nine sequels and a game based on a sequel's engine. Oh the hilarity.
liquid_metal

Hmm, most interesting. If you take the first letter of each title it spells 'tfhlhmrzrn'. I believe that's Swedish for 'drab'.
Reverend_Joseph

Sims 2. Sorry everyone, but I'm guilty of buying a copy. Looks like the Internet connection hassle is starting to affect sales of HL2 then.
Hiller6

Virgin megastores

TOP 10

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

1. THE SIMS 2	EA
2. ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
3. LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
4. ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
5. MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
6. ZOO TYCOON 2	MICROSOFT
7. HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
8. SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
9. NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA
10. DOOM 3	ACTIVISION

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QUESTION: Which of the following do you not get to do in *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*?

- A Fly a plane
- B Defend an airfield
- C Drive a tank

Send your answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 152, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: March 2 2005

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

FEBRUARY

CITY OF HEROES	NCSOFT
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS	DEEP SILVER
GTR	ATARI
IMMORTAL CITIES: CHILDREN OF THE NILE	SEGA
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
THE PUNISHER	THQ
WILL OF STEEL	GMX MEDIA

MARCH

BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30	UBISOFT
COLD FEAR	UBISOFT
DARWINIA	INTROVERSION SOFTWARE
KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
PARIAH	HIP INTERACTIVE
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION	UBISOFT
PROJECT: SNOWBLIND	EIDOS
PSYCHOTOXIC	WHIPTAIL
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
STOLEN	HIP INTERACTIVE
THE BARD'S TALE	UBISOFT

APRIL

EMPIRE EARTH II	VU GAMES
FREEDOM FORCE VS. THE THIRD REICH	DIGITAL JESTERS
LEGO STAR WARS	EIDOS
STRONGHOLD 2	GLOBAL STAR
TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE	DIGITAL JESTERS
SWAT 4	VU GAMES
X2: THE RETURN	DEEP SILVER

MAY

BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
HEART OF EMPIRE	DEEP SILVER
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ

JUNE

F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR

Q1 2005

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION	ATARI
BOILING POINT	ATARI
CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH	BETHESDA
CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT	GLOBAL STAR
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DRAGONSHARD	ATARI
HOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY	EIDOS
IMPERIAL GLORY	EIDOS
RAINBOW 6: LOCKDOWN	UBISOFT
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
VIVISECTOR: BEAST INSIDE	BRIGADES
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

Q2 2005

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE	EIDOS
EARTH 2160	DEEP SILVER
MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3	THQ

Q3 2005

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
PSYCHONAUTS	TBA
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR	ACTIVISION

2005

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BIOSHOCK	TBA
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL	ACTIVISION
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION	BETHESDA
KING KONG	UBISOFT
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION
STUBBS THE ZOMBIE	ASPYR
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE WITCHER	TBA
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTER
YOU ARE EMPTY	1C

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

BLOODYRAYNE 2

You've seen the boobs in motion on last month's demo and the US has had the full game for a while, but the dust on UK distribution rights hasn't settled just yet. However, we can assure you that it won't be too much longer. Hold in there.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Terminal Reality
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.terminalreality.com



WISH

Despite a large fanbase and huge numbers of beta client downloads, it looks like the plucky indie developers behind this promising (if slightly confusing) MMOG have thrown in the towel. Mutable Realms, yet another victim of the prolonged online bubble burst, we hardly knew ye.

- Publisher: N/A
- Developer: Mutable Realms
- ETA: KIA
- Website: www.mutablerealms.com/

THE BARD'S TALE

Another game the yanks have dibs on is this bizarre comedy role-player from InXile. Ubisoft has picked up the tab for UK peddling, and is promising ale-quaffing with Cary Elwes (star of *The Princess Bride*) and witty cleavage comments come March.

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: InXile
- ETA: March
- Website: www.thebardstale.com



TOP 10 REASONS YOUNG PC GAMERS DON'T KNOW THEY'RE BORN

1. **The fabled boot disc** Config.sys. Autoexec.bat. The things we did for a touch of memory, eh? Happy days.
2. **Selecting your sound card** Sound Blaster? Roland Midi? DMA 1 or 3? Port 240? What does this mean?
3. **Installing the wrong drivers** Why won't my mouse work? This is ridiculous. I mean... oh shit.
4. **Yoda Stories** Horribly misunderstood or seminal desktop catastrophe? We'll never know...
5. **Expanded or Extended?** Two different sorts of memory with two extremely similar names – which wasn't great when your computer was lacking both.
6. **Full Motion Video** Lots of game developers going 'Ooh! Look what we can do' and producing crap videos of pixelated jesters dancing in static castles.
7. **DOS** The origin of the oft-repeated phrase, 'It might as well be in f**king Chinese. CD/ my arse.'
8. **Mouse fluff** In the slightly olden days, Quake majesty was a question of how many lumps of lint you had in your mouse rather than actual skill.
9. **Sound through the PC internal speaker** No sound? Then simply listen to the sound of three keys of a Casio keyboard on loop.
10. **Tim Curry** A contributor to the FMV plague of the early '90s, his name still haunts CD-ROM drives everywhere for fear of his return.

IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT, YOU'LL GET A PC ZONE GOODIE BAG!

SOURCE: Bureau of Everything Round Here That Used to be Fields



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With PC game graphics now reaching astounding heights, artificial intelligence has become the new Holy Grail. PC ZONE investigates the evolution of free will in the virtual world of videogames...

WE'VE ALL experienced that freakish moment where a computer-controlled character stops acting like a wind-up robot and dishes out an unexpected emotional wedgie. It might have been the *Rome: Total War* opponent luring you in with an exposed target before splitting your ranks in two with a swiftly executed surprise attack. Maybe it was the way the mercenaries try to flank your position in the bullet-heavy paradise of *Far Cry*? Or how about the eerily realistic way that a guard in *Thief: Deadly Shadows* searches for your scrawny hide, checking all the possible hiding places and muttering to himself?

The philosophical question of whether a machine can behave like a human being – that it can actually be aware of its own consciousness – is becoming increasingly important, as technology becomes more and more integrated into our everyday lives. Artificial Intelligence – AI – has also been an obsession with science-fiction writers and film-makers for decades, from the crude tin-foil robots in early black-and-white TV episodes of *Dr Who*, through Kubrick's disturbing HAL 9000 computer aboard the visionary *2001: A Space Odyssey*, right up to the incessantly spinning cameras of the recent CGI-stuffed popcorn blockbuster *I, Robot*.

However, videogames are also at the forefront of research into artificial intelligence, as Elixir Studio's CEO Demis Hassabis explains: "All game AI to some

extent is illusionary. Within the boundaries of a game environment, it's often difficult for an end user to distinguish between smoke and mirrors and a real system just from observable behaviour, thus removing a lot of the potential commercial motivation for doing 'proper' AI. Yet despite these commercial constraints, videogames do contain a lot of extremely cutting-edge AI that in many cases is way in advance of research efforts going on elsewhere in academia or industry."

Our simulated opponents are now genuinely engaged in problem solving, decision-making and communicating with their own kind. More significantly, they're actually beginning to learn from past experiences and mistakes and adapt accordingly. Games like the forthcoming *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl* are set to continually surprise us with the spontaneous actions of their CPU-powered enemies, based on memories, simulated emotions and audio-visual knowledge of their environments. The videogame AI revolution has begun, and it's about to get a whole lot smarter...

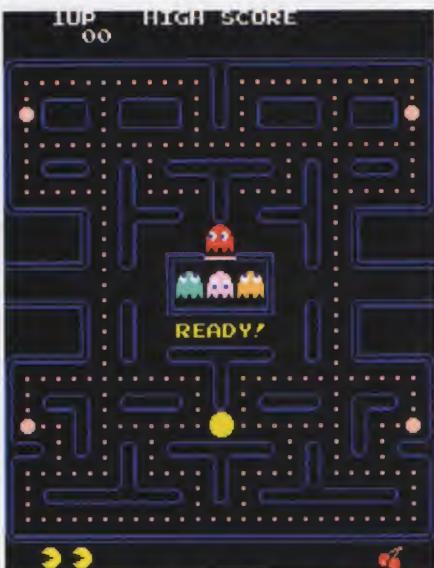
WHEN AI IS BORN

It wasn't always like this though. The computer-controlled baddies in retro titles such as Matthew Smith's ground-breaking *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* platform games in the 1980s paced backwards

and forwards or up and down ad infinitum – possibly driven insane from the squawking electronic soundtrack and minimalist décor.

But, although the virtual characters in early games were predictable, if you look beneath the surface you'll notice an occasional spark of intelligence – a rare but heart-warming experience akin to hearing a member of McFly use a long word like 'gymnasium'. So, while Pac-Man himself was all mouth and no trousers, the ghosts pursuing their pill-popping prey would occasionally cease their search-and-destroy routine and head for the corners in scatter mode, presenting you with a good opportunity to clean up awkward areas of the screen.

"I felt it would be too stressful for a human being like Pac-Man to be continually surrounded and hunted down, so I created the monsters' invasions to come in waves," says *Pac-Man* creator, Toru Iwatani. "The ghosts would attack and then they'd retreat. As time went by they would regroup, attack and disperse again. It seemed more natural than having constant attack." The hungry ghosts even had their own distinct personalities, one being notably more aggressive and another more timid than the others –



Pac-Man's ghosts had basic characteristics.



STALKER takes this further...



Rome's AI is more tactical.

seemingly turning and fleeing if you jerked aggressively in its direction.

This, then, is the birth of AI as we understand it today – emergent game behaviour that's adaptive rather than static, making decisions and enacting describable behaviours in response to the actions of the player. Patrick Deupree, developer of *Half-Life: Opposing Force* at Gearbox elaborates: "The decision of an alien in *Space Invaders* to shoot at you was a form of AI.

Later, *Galaga* took the *Space Invaders* concept to a new

level and added more AI that would actually have aliens break ranks and charge the player. Of course, this type of AI is primarily based on rolling the dice to see if the game wants to attack and it isn't adaptive AI."

RISE OF THE BOTS

Jumping forward a decade, scurrying past the seminal 'god games' of Peter Molyneux's *Populous* and Sid Meier's *Civilization*, and in 1994, id Software unleashed *Quake*'s all-consuming multiplayer online frag-fest onto an unsuspecting world. However, potential deathmatch addicts who were lagged out or constantly being slaughtered online were soon crying out for a way of playing offline. The answer? Bots: intelligent CPU-controlled adversaries who could play as well as, or even better than, their human counterparts.

Steve Polge's infamous Reaper bot frapped head and shoulders above an emerging pack, with the ability to learn levels as it played, use classic Deathmatch tactics like telefrapping and beat a hasty retreat when low on health or ammo. The Reaper could even adapt its game plan between maps and was a sparkling example of extensible user-programmed AI, where



The Havok engine provides lifelike physics, adding to the illusion of reality.

players can build on the programmers' original intentions.

As Steve Polge said at the time: "The bot's artificial intelligence is very realistic. They jump around and strafe when you're trying to nail them. With half a dozen or so running around a DM level, it's just like being in a Net game." The Reaper was never fully finished because Polge was snapped up to become AI guru for Epic Games' *Unreal* series, yet his creation endures as a defining moment in AI history. The Reaper is the granddaddy of virtually every intelligent FPS adversary.

Fast-forward to 1998, and a PC title came along that truly changed our expectations of videogame AI. Using a fantastic mix of scripted sequences and emergent AI, Valve Software's *Half-Life* did for artificial intelligence what Pamela Anderson did for silicone. Enemies losing a fight would bolt and fetch reinforcements, soldier squads moved in formation with covering fire and fallback positions, while others used flanking moves to sneak up from behind.

"The human grunts in *Half-Life* had a clip for their ammo, so when their clip was empty, they had to find cover while they reloaded," says Patrick Deupree. "If they were behind cover, they might throw a grenade at the last known position of the player. If the player threw a grenade, they would react, either by hiding or by covering their head."

"The decision of an alien in *Space Invaders* to shoot at you was a form of AI. *Galaga* took that to a new level!"

PATRICK DEUPREE GEARBOX SOFTWARE

THE AI TIMELINE

Countless people and games have left their mark in the annals of AI. Here's our selection of the real landmarks...

1950

Noughts & Crosses – AS Douglas programs closed AI in Tic-Tac-Toe.



1950 The Turing Test begins thinking on AI. Isaac Asimov's three laws of robotics published in *I, Robot*.



1958

Tennis – Willy Higinbotham's Tennis game astounds visitors to the Brookhaven National lab.

1955

MIT Professor John McCarthy coins the term 'Artificial Intelligence'. Checkers – IBM's Arthur Samuels' program uses a neural Net to 'learn' from human players.

1961

Spacewar – Steve 'Slug' Russell invents the first computer game on the PDP-1.

1959

MIT Artificial Intelligence lab founded by John McCarthy and Marvin Minsky.



Before *Half-Life* came along, this sort of behaviour was unheard of, as almost every FPS used inflexible, hard-coded, scripted AI responses: shoot at the player if you could see them, and if you couldn't see them, chase them until you could. *Half-Life's* key advance was its 'schedule-driven state machine'. Enemies were aware of both their own and the player's game 'state' at every moment and could choose from a vast library of appropriate responses. This innovative response-based system, combined with existing flocking and squad-techniques, helped make *Half-Life's* AI flexible and unpredictable.

"Part of what makes the creatures interesting in the *Half-Life* games is that they can communicate," says Deupree. "If there are four enemies in a room and one can see you, then the others will come running to help. That is, unless you've killed their squad leader, at which point they won't talk to each other and are easier to pick off one by one."

STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES

After *Half-Life*'s release, despite the resounding success of its AI, games continued to hit branches as they fell out of the stupid tree. Nothing is quite as

frustrating as an NPC gracefully running on the spot (apparently intent on running through an impenetrable wall), or a sentry standing around next to the corpse of a recently sniped work-mate wondering what to have for his tea. Another common complaint is for friends and enemies to stand around like statues until you perform a certain action when they suddenly wake up – an affliction that can be notably found in disappointing efforts like *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death* and even in blockbusters like *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault*. Hell, there are a fair few moments in *Half-Life 2* when the Combine will just blunder towards you with little regard for anything apart from looking pretty when they get a radiator fired into their face at point-blank range.

The trouble is, games are now capable of depicting characters and environments in incredibly lifelike detail, engaged in ever more sophisticated and detailed activities. As such, the relative stupidity of these



Three ages of FPS AI: Quake's bots were adaptable...



...Half-Life used them to create mood & set scenes...



...and *Half-Life 2* added human characteristics.



1972

Pong – Nolan Bushnell, of Atari fame, creates the first videogame.
Star Trek – Mike Mayfield's homage to Shatner & Co.
Adventure – the world's first text adventure, written by William Crowther.
Hunt The Wumpus – Proto AI-driven cave exploration.

1980

Zork – text parsing comes of age in the first of an epic series.
Ultima – Richard Garriott founds the modern RPG.

1983

Jumpman – platforming fun from Randy Glover.
M.U.L.E. – advanced AI terraforming strategy, *M.U.L.E.* quickly becomes one of the most pirated games in history

1988

Dungeon Master – Faster Than Light's colossal graphic adventure.
Elite – ground-breaking AI drives a universe of spaceship exploration, trading and dogfighting.

1978

Space Invaders – unleashes the arcade revolution with AI the size of a pea.
Adventureland – Scott Adams makes the world's first commercial adventure.

1982

Pac-Man – years later, people were still discovering the four ghosts' AI quirks.
Archon – fantasy BattleChess trailblazer that crosses AI with fantasy action

1984

Elite – ground-breaking AI drives a universe of spaceship exploration, trading and dogfighting.



EMERGENT AI

WHEN AI TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN

During the creation of a game, AI often develops in ways the designer never planned. This emergent behaviour sometimes works in the game's favour and is kept; other times it's to the detriment of the game and is dumped. Every now and again though, an AI quirk appears which is simply hilarious.

When the team behind *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* was adding vehicle-related features to the game, they included the ability for AI characters to drive. "Taun Tauns are AI-driven characters and as such they can drive vehicles," smiles LucasArts' Christopher Reed. "One day, we started seeing them on top of one another walking around the level. At first I thought they were stuck, but soon it became clear that one was literally riding the other. Because they run around in packs, they're often very close and if one walks up over a rock or a slope and happens to land on top of another, he starts to drive the other around, even if he didn't intend to. It was an unexpected side effect that made a few of our designers laugh so hard they had tears in their eyes..."





The 'zombie factor' often allows developers to dumb down the AI.

A BRIEF GLOSSARY

AI has generated its own peculiar language and lexicon. Here's a quick guide to some of the more common terms...

ARTIFICIAL LIFE – Artificial intelligence that imitates or uses the characteristics of real life.

BARK – a vocal response from an AI-controlled character.

BOT – the name given to AI-driven opponents you can play with offline in a multiplayer FPS.

EXPERT SYSTEM – An AI system which is an 'expert', knowing the specialist rules of a game. The AI then judges the game situation using these known rules to suggest a solution or its next move.

FLOCKING – An AI system which simulates group movement based on existing human and animal patterns.

FUZZY LOGIC – A simple way of expressing a degree or amount of a characteristic. For example, if 1 = happy and 0 = unhappy, then for a binary system someone is either totally happy or unhappy. Introduce fuzzy logic, and you could say that 0.9 would be quite happy, or 0.1 which would be quite unhappy.

NEURAL NET – A program in which the AI can learn and grow as it plays.

PATHFINDING – The ability to navigate across terrain. Sounds simple, rarely is.

games – most compellingly represented by the behaviour of their virtual inhabitants – has become more and more apparent. Seeing a blurry, hundred-pixel demon wandering around in 'now where did I leave my keys?' type circles is one thing – seeing a 100,000-polygon work of art stumbling around in similar fashion tends to jar somewhat.

Most developers agree that: (a) games are only beginning to incorporate decent artificial intelligence; (b) the biggest leaps in this technology have occurred over the last decade and; (c) the AI in many modern releases would be out of its depth in a parking lot puddle. As a result, game makers have started to realise that creating a compelling game experience requires more than just nice-looking trees

– all the excitement is now about a game's grey matter, not its polygon-pushing power.

YOU'VE GOT THE BRAINS...

Thomas Young of PathEngine, a company that produces AI middleware (pre-built systems that can be bought and used in games development) elaborates. "Monsters or NPCs that can't chase you around obstructions is bad AI. Monsters that lack variation in behaviour is bad AI. Limited interaction with monsters and NPCs is bad AI. For me, intelligence is the ability to come up with meaningful solutions to arbitrary problems and situations that get thrown at you."

Here's the science: game worlds are created from both a graphical point of

view (polygons) and a physical point of view (the collision mesh), but for effective AI there also has to be modelling from a behavioural point of view. The better the behavioural programming, the more bots can take on a life of their own and understand simple navigation.

"Most games use a navigational mesh or some form of mark-up on the terrain," explains Dave Gargan of physics engine provider Havok. "Level designers will designate a safe place or a bonus item and mark up paths around the level that are safe for the AI characters to walk around. The AI characters will know where these safe nodes are and will use some search algorithm to find a path that will minimise the chances of them being seen as they collect health."

ARMY INTELLIGENCE

In the forthcoming WWII shooter *Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30*, the Gearbox development team is working on NPCs that will have four levels of AI. These will be: Simulated Intelligence, which tells an enemy how to move, pick a target and shoot; Scripted AI, for certain events; Situational AI, which gives commands to the enemy on-the-fly; and Expert Systems Intelligence, where the actual environment speaks to the AI. The latter is the most interesting, with certain locations talking to troops, telling them this might be a good place to hide or use as cover. This is a clever programming magic trick to convince you that your troops are intelligent, when really it's the nearby shrubbery or wall that has the brains.

"Different kinds of games require different AI and I'm obviously very interested in NPCs that speak, interact with others, plot and plan, have emotions – basically, creating AI systems that can 'broaden the palette' of a player's



Thief's guards employ pathfinding well.



Half-Life 2's bad guys prefer the direct action.



1990

SimCity – genius Will Wright's AI makes you master of the metropolis.
Wing Commander – Chris Roberts' space borne epic.

1989

Populous – Peter Molyneux's ground-breaker displays god-like AI.
Stunt Car Racer – Geoff Crummard's racer roars onto the grid to introduce racing AI.

1992

TD-Gammon – backgammon program 'learns' to play through neural nets.

1991

Civilization – Sid Meier's turn-based epic see you competing against diverse (and cheating) AI cultures.
Geoff Crummard's Grand Prix – gentlemen, start your engines for realistic race lines and drivers.



1993

Wolfenstein – the FPS peeps over the parapet with a chaingun-toting Hitler.
Dune 2 – a revolution in RTS gaming.
Ultima Underworld – Warren Spector's 3D adventure.

1994

Doom – the FPS comes of age with semi-intelligent enemies.

1996

Creatures – neural nets drive virtual creatures' learning and life cycles.
Quake and the Reaper bot – Steve Polge's ground-breaking AI creation hammers Quake newbies.

1995

Ing Foundation prize of \$1.6 million offered for any computer which can beat a Taiwanese professional at Go.



Counter-Strike's illusory AI.



STALKER aims for realism.

emotional responses and enable new kinds of game experiences," says Michael Booth, CEO of Turtle Rock Studios, responsible for the bots in *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. "But the interesting thing is that we don't actually have to create 'real' intelligent actors to achieve our goals, we merely have to create the illusion of intelligent actors. It's a much more tractable problem to fool human perceptions of intentions and emotions than to actually re-create them. As long as our CS:CZ bots didn't do something obviously stupid, players would maintain their suspension of disbelief and assume the bot 'knew' what it was doing."

According to Jacques Gaubil of AI middleware company Kynogon, there are three essential components of effective artificial intelligence: perception, decision, and action. "Perception is key," says Gaubil. "Let's say you're developing a squad game and want to split the squad in two groups, attacking the enemy from the right and left. Making the decision of sending NPCs to the left is easy – what's difficult is the perception because you must consider all the



Far Cry has seen the most effective 'group' AI yet in a shooter.

access ways. In most games, the NPC is a blind man with a stick. The huge challenge is in improving the capacity of bots to perceive their environment well – then you will have the correct decision-making process."

In short, dynamic AI is the new 3D – where once graphics were the overwhelming priority, more and more

development time is now devoted to AI, and many contemporary games include an AI designer credit. AI middleware companies like Pathfinder and Kynogon allow developers to hit the ground running, fitting ready-made emotion models into the game from the beginning of development (rather than being hurriedly added towards the end, as has historically been the case). Meanwhile, AI programmers are swapping notes with each other at conferences and liaising with swoty academic-types at colleges.



"Dynamic AI is the new 3D – where once graphics were priority, more development time is now devoted to AI"

As NPCs slowly begin to figure out their virtual worlds, so AI game gurus are turning into technical psychologists – equipping their characters with mini-me emotions and learning abilities. Armed with crude artificial neural networks, the virtual pets in *Creatures* (1996) could adapt to their environments and learn from one another. In *Ultima Online*, every animal has a set of guiding principles and their actions change according to their mood. Meanwhile, *The Sims* series and *Black & White* have pushed the boundaries of virtual wisdom with forays into neural networks, chemical metabolisms and digital DNA.

FACING THE FUTURE

STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl, an ambitious first-person shooter set in a bleak, irradiated 'forbidden zone', could be one of the major titles of 2005 to imbue its AI bots with feelings, desires and coherent behaviours. Currently being developed by GSC Game World, the company claims that its creations are not simply what we know as 'bots', but instead are artificially-created people with human traits, weaknesses and unpredictability.

These other 'Stalkers' traverse the huge open zone at the same time as you, and are subject to the whims of the environment and the threat of packs of mutant creatures that follow their own independent AI routines of hunger, fear

THE BRAINS BEHIND THE GAMES

DEVELOPERS TALK ABOUT THEIR FAVOURITE AI MOMENTS

"It has to be when the first batch of speech was recorded and triggered for the first time in the game. The hunters suddenly came alive, mumbling to themselves and talking to each other – chatting about what they were going to do at the weekend, or moaning about their lives."

Keith McLeman, programmer on Rockstar's *Manhunt*

"My favourite AI-driven moment for *World Championship Pool 2004* was when the AI players 'learned' to play jump shots. Not only does the shot look totally outrageous when it's played, but hearing the screams of disbelief from somebody across the office as an AI player takes a crucial game with a jump shot is particularly satisfying."

Jake Garland, AI programmer on *Blade Interactive's World Championship Pool 2004*

"Our fans discovered that if you left one of your coastal cities empty, the AI would always try to land an invasion fleet to that city. Thus, if you moved units in and out of coastal cities, the AI got stuck in an infinite loop trying to land at the now empty city each turn."

Soren Johnson co-designer and lead programmer on Firaxis' *Civilization III*

"One of my personal favourite moments occurred when a team of PATRIOT soldiers (US) attacked an *Evil Genius* base and one of them got incapacitated in a fight. His team-mates then backtracked in an attempt to return and rescue him; it was definitely a case of 'never leave a man behind'."

Demis Hassabis, CEO of Elixir Studios on *Evil Genius*

"In *Black & White 2*, we've had all kinds of amusing AI: from soldiers who slice and dice the enemy, only to break down in tears mourning their dead opponent, to creatures who haven't quite mastered spell casting, yet themselves blast and then run around terrified not knowing what to do!"

Neil Wallace, AI programmer on Lionhead's *Black & White 2*

2003

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero – Valve and Turtle Rock Studios raise the standard of computer-controlled characters, with friendly and enemy bots that offer the most realistic offline multiplayer deathmatch yet.



1998

Half-Life – the moment AI's potential for gaming is finally realised, with human and alien enemies that will fight each other as well as use complex group tactics in battle. *Unreal* – extensible AI begins the reign of bots.

1997

Age Of Empires – promised an AI which learned from players' strategies (tragically ditched before release). *Deep Blue* is the first Chess program to defeat Grand Master Garry Kasparov.



2000

The Sims – embedded AI becomes an integral part of game's design.

1999

Medal Of Honor – PSone enemies hurl grenades back at you.



2001

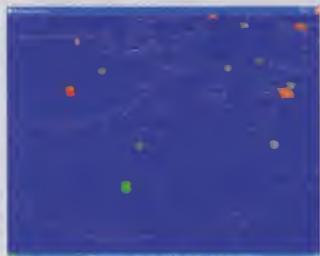
Black & White – a creature who grows, learns and assists the player. *Halo: Combat Evolved* – Bungie sets the new standard for AI.

2004

Far Cry – has enemies that use cover and talk to each other. *Half-Life 2* – Valve's sequel has both scripted and adaptive AI.

BOTTY HELL!

PathEngine and Kynogon are two middleware companies providing developers with AI pathfinding solutions...



The AI paths in all their glory.

PATHEGINE

A monster is drawn in red, the player in green. Metal crates or obstacles are drawn in grey, wooden crates in sandy brown. There's also a 'power pill' drawn in pink, that enables the monster to smash wooden crates for a certain amount of time.



Spiders find their true path in life.

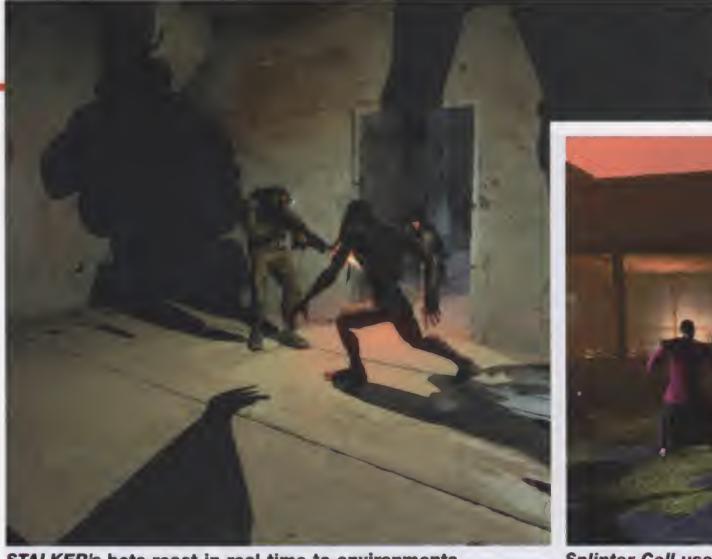
KYNOGON

3D games require modelling from a physical perspective (collision meshes), a rendering perspective (polygons), and a behavioural perspective (pathdata). This pathdata, created by middleware company Kynogon, is generated automatically and allows AI to pathfind, identifying hiding places and access ways in real-time. Developers can insert this pathdata straight into their 3D worlds, manually modifying and editing the paths.

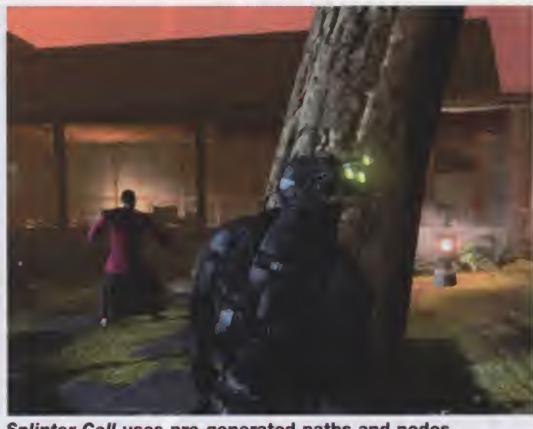
and exposure. *STALKER* aims to create a living, breathing game world where everything that happens is governed by the needs, desires and actions of its autonomous occupants. Even when rivals aren't in your vicinity, they'll be ticking over in the background in purely mathematical form – trading, sleeping, fighting, grouping up and going on missions.



Far Cry and *Half-Life 2* remain the standard-setters.



STALKER's bots react in real-time to environments.



Splinter Cell uses pre-generated paths and nodes.

Close up too, there's no over-riding AI structure to guide your virtual friends and enemies, only that which lies in the NPC's own virtual head. Here, for example, if you're hiding from a rival Stalker, then he'll remember the last place he saw you and have to use his own intuition – cautiously circling the area and trying to second-guess your position. In battle, meanwhile, the developer claims that human characters will take cover in realistic ways, retreat when they need to reload, duck around corners and, essentially, be fully aware of how to use the environment around them for their own tactical advantage.

FUN, FUN, FUN

But no matter how much artificial intelligence has the capacity to blow your mind, it must remain fun – something that the creators of 1984's ground-breaking space-trading sim *Elite* are well aware of. Towards the start of the project, Ian Bell created some extra clever tactics for the enemies who would respond to the way the player was flying.

"Trouble was," explains David Braben, *Elite*'s co-developer, "the bad guys were too good. They were almost impossible to shake off and, worse, you hardly ever saw them. They'd go straight onto your tail and start shooting at you. Ian made them less intelligent by reducing how often they re-planned their paths, but they were still very difficult to fight and you almost never got the in-your-sights WWII dogfight chases that we wanted. In the end, we abandoned this altogether."

and reverted to simplistic behaviour."

It's a similar story for the superb *Call Of Duty* FPS: "Some of the earlier versions of the *Call Of Duty* AI were too intelligent," says Jason West, chief technical officer at Infinity Ward. "If you took cover at a corner, the AI would know that's the only way you could come from, and they would train their weapons on that spot with super-human patience and persistence. As soon as you stuck your head out, you'd be dead."

"For the most part, though, the AI in modern games is still very crude," says Turtle Rock's Michael Booth. "The fact that most game reviews equate 'AI' with 'pathfinding' illustrates we're still at a very early stage. However, we'll continue to improve the state of game AI, both by software innovations, and by the availability of more and more processing power that allows us to use more CPU-intensive algorithms. Just as 'survival

horror' games became possible once we could display graphics realistic enough to actually scare us, 'emotional' games will become possible once our AI technologies can engage our emotional responses to the point of actually making us cry, laugh, rage, and feel real attachment to our virtual allies and antagonists."

Whether or not AI will one day rise up, bust out of our monitors and enslave the human race remains to be seen, but be assured that in the next few years when you look at the autonomous behaviour in games, you'll be faced with a startling sight: you'll see yourself looking back. □

GET INVOLVED!

Have you ever been pleasantly surprised by a game's smart-arsed NPCs? Or maybe you're sick of games that are despising villages of idiots? Send your opinions, rants and disturbed offerings to PCZONE at the usual address.





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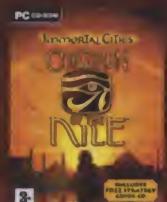
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"/"ACT OF WAR IMPRESSES IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES." PC GAMER//

Mission briefing

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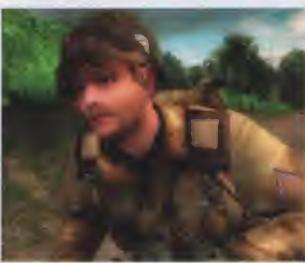
ATARI



"Last one there does the washing up for a week!"



Nobody wanted to admit it, but somebody had let one off.



They ain't heavy...

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

Steve Hill went to Montreal and all he brought back was this extensive preview...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gearbox
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.brothersinarmsgame.com
ETA March

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Extremely authentic approach
- Unique gameplay conventions
- Development team includes a real colonel
- Gearbox's president is Randy

CV

gearbox

GEARBOX

Siphoning much of the talent from the burgeoning Texas scene, Gearbox has had its sticky fingers in a number of gaming pies.

1999 *Half-Life: Opposing Force* put the development studio on the map.

2001 *Half-Life: Blue Shift* enabled you to play as the hapless security guard.

2002 *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* proved a surprise departure, but was suitably down wiv da kidz.

2002 *James Bond 007: Nightfire* was a largely anonymous addition to 007's varied game history.

2003 *Halo: Combat Evolved* arrived two years after the Xbox version with new weapons and online play.

2004 *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* slipped like Billy-O, but it got there in the end.

WHERE THE hell would the entertainment industry be without World War II? You only had to sit through the Christmas TV schedules to be bombarded by it. *The Guns Of Navarone*, *The Bridge On The River Kwai*, *The Heroes Of Telemark* – each of them eking out a couple of hours of action from some area of the conflict. As for games, you literally can't move for WWII titles. Try it. Go on. Here's one now:

Brothers In Arms, now encumbered by the entirely superfluous subtitle, *Road To Hill 30*. Why bother? To disassociate it from the Dire Straits album of

the same name? To make the free bobble hat look more/less risible?

Who knows? What we do know is that Hill 30 is in Normandy, France, and you need to get your allied arse there quick-smart. You are Sgt Matt Baker, and your elite squad of 101st Airborne Division is scattered all over the French countryside. And when we say French countryside, we don't mean some fat bloke in Texas having a guess at what the French countryside looks like. These

mothers have been there, bought the T-shirt, intimidated the locals, snapped every blade of grass and studied every map and historical document available.

MORNING GLORY

Of course, everyone says that, but we actually believe this lot. We believe it because we were flown to a bitterly cold Montreal, taken to Ubisoft's HQ at some ungodly hour and sat through a presentation only marginally less in-depth



French countryside, accurately depicted.

BAND OF BROTHERS IN ARMS

WHAT CAME FIRST,
THE GAME OR THE
TV SHOW? IT WAS
THE BOOK...

Due to the name and subject matter, *Brothers In Arms* has naturally been compared to the HBO series, *Band Of Brothers*. Gearbox president Randy Pitchford insists that development began before the programme was aired, although he's familiar with the source books and concedes that they share similar themes, namely the brotherhood of war. As he explains: "Call Of Duty or Medal Of Honor are about the honour of fighting for your country, or the sense of duty. And you talk to these guys and they're like, 'Duty? What a bunch of bullshit'. It's the guy next to them, that's who they were fighting for. When you're in the shit and there's people shooting at you, you have to kill. Who're you doing that for? The guy next to you. And we had to understand that. I'm not a soldier - I make videogames."



Dead in the head we reckon.

than that faced by the D-Day troops. However, while stabbing ourselves with a biro in order to stave off jetlag, we did glean some info, including: "It's really early in the morning. I'm from Dallas, I don't get up this early, I'm a games developer."

producing a seemingly unending series of photos, historical blueprints, aerial reconnaissance imagery, the lot. There was even somewhat tasteless mobile phone footage of a bewildered WWII veteran saying

"The focus was to make a game that puts you in a squad of soldiers"

RANDY PITCHFORD, PRESIDENT, GEARBOX SOFTWARE

This from Gearbox president, Randy Pitchford, who – in tribute to absent military advisor colonel John Antal (retired) – began the presentation with the battle cry: "Everyone fights! Nobody quits! Always attack! Hoo-ah!"

Things could only get better from there, and Pitchford gives a convincing argument as to the game's authenticity,

how realistic the game was and how disturbing he found it.

HI, I'M RANDY

By now wholly convinced of the game's anal approach to authenticity, we collar Randy Pitchford and ask him not how, but



It's like shooting Nazi fish in a barrel.

why? Surely a hedge is a hedge is a hedge. Was authenticity the initial focus?

"The focus from the beginning was to make a game that puts you in a squad of soldiers," says Pitchford. "Here's the difference: you see a movie about a squad of soldiers and it's always about the squad. You're just one of the guys. But when you play a game, you get dragged all over the world and you don't ever remember the names. I don't even remember my own character's name, let alone the names of anybody



"It's for you sarge. Something about double-glazing."



CELEBRITY SKIN

"This is the last time I use a budget airline."

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FILM KIND

Brothers In Arms was on display at last year's E3 show in LA, attracting the attention of the usual unwashed obese masses sporting *World Of Warcraft* chic and eau de burger. Among the limited gene pool lurked a familiar face though – none other than be-capped film director Steven Spielberg. Spotting Gearbox president Randy Pitchford, he announced, "I've played all your games," and spent the next 20 minutes interrogating him as to specifics of logic and gameplay. Finally, according to Randy: "He complimented us on our graphics. And he made *Jurassic Park*..."

else. So we started with this idea of wanting to be in a squad of soldiers and as we figured out how to do that, we really got caught up in the history of it. Then we thought, well, this is an opportunity for us not only to tell a great story about soldiering, but also a chance to make sure people who're going to play this game are going to trust us implicitly that this is something that happened."

Pitchford asserts that when he met some of the actual veterans, he felt he had an obligation to make it right. "Some of them didn't even want to talk to us

"The game would not be what it is without colonel John Antal. He's worked with the team every single day"

because they complained about how other games had treated the subject matter and how they're almost offensive to them. Have you ever seen a movie that's about something you know a lot about, like journalism, and when you watch it, it's almost embarrassing and horrifying? That's how soldiers feel when they play some of these games. So we wanted to make a game that could be enjoyed by gamers, but also one that a guy like the colonel could vouch for."

Ah yes, the legendary colonel John Antal (retired).



There's always one who plays up to the camera isn't there?



You relive battles fought by the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment.

thing. When we first met him, he was a gamer. He played a lot of the RTS games because he liked the strategy and he kept saying, 'Some day, somebody's got to take the strategy element and put it in a squad level.' Like, that's what we're doing! It was a really easy sell. He'd been writing books and telling narratives, he'd been training tactics."

YES SIR MR ANTAL!

Antal has actually written a book called *Combat Team*, which is used to train officers about squad-level tactics. First, it gives you a fictional squad, teaches you something about tactics and then puts you in fictional situations and asks you to make a tactical decision. "It's like an adventure book," says Pitchford.

"Depending on your decision, you flip to a different part of the book. And it's great; it's like this guy's a game designer! It's paper, but he's thinking that way, and the army used his works to train soldiers. He's interested in tactical play, he loves solving tactical problems, so for him to have this infinite interactive environment –



Soldiers seek cover automatically.





Why Don't You?...



Steve Hill: gaming chimp (official).

FORGET ALL THIS TACTICS NONSENSE AND JUST LET US BLOW STUFF UP FOR GAWD'S SAKE...

Suppressing fire, flanking moves, chains of command... It's all very impressive, but how is the average game-playing chimp supposed to know what he's doing? We're not soldiers. We play games to fill the yawning voids in our lives and to take our minds off the futility of existence – not to execute high-level military procedures. To our minds, if you shoot someone in the face, their head comes off – they don't lurk behind a hedge with a meter hovering above them showing the amount of suppressing fire they're taking.

It would go against the entire ethos of the game and probably require a rewrite from the ground up, but how about a moron mode where you can simply steam in and stick it up Jerry? Or should we just stick to *Call Of Duty*?

and he doesn't have to get shot at – he loves it. He's been a great resource."

TACTICAL WARFARE

The colonel, a high-profile military pundit, was also able to open a lot of doors for Gearbox in terms of access to actual weapons and so forth. His chief area is tactics though, and despite *Brothers In Arms*' notional similarity to other WWII FPS games, it's a highly tactical affair that follows hard and fast rules of combat. For instance, if an enemy is protected by cover, you can't simply unload your weapon at him in the hope of getting a lucky shot. What you can do is apply suppressing fire (indicated by a red meter above his head) and order your squad-mates to flank him and take him out.

Utilising your squad to the full will be a key skill, and having them react correctly is crucial to the game's success. According to Pitchford: "Having the colonel as part of our team was a big part of how that worked out. You may have played a squad game before, but they don't really have any AI, the allies. You have a bunch of complicated commands, and whenever the command is given, that's the AI – the soldiers are just waiting for a command. In *Brothers In Arms*, the colonel helped us program the soldiers with the actual standard



The explosions in *Brothers In Arms* are gut-wrenchingly realistic.



America invades the Shire.

operating procedures in the battlefield, just subtle things. The soldiers are trained, they know what to do, so when they encounter an enemy, they know to find the appropriate cover and return fire, and that just works in the game. This is how it works in real life – it's a chain of command. We wanted to emulate that."

the squad does either. And we cut out all the bit about field-stripping weapons. The weapon never jams, because it's just not fun. You don't understand why that happened and you don't have a good interface for dealing with it. You certainly don't have the same interface the soldiers had for dealing with it.

"I've played games that've tried to simulate that stuff and there's 50,000 buttons, and it's just frustrating. So yeah, there are trade-offs, and they're hard trade-offs to make. But the trade-offs we make don't take away from that feeling of authenticity – they just make the game more fun to play."

We've played it, and it's certainly a unique approach. In many respects, the game has more in common with *Full Spectrum Warrior* than *Medal Of Honor*, and if you're hoping to charge in with all guns blazing, you're in for a rude awakening. We'll find out whether gamers actually want to use their brains as well as their guns with the exclusive review next month. 



IT'S ONLY A GAME

For all the unprecedented realism, surely there have to be some compromises to facilitate the gameplay?

"That's the hard part," agrees Pitchford.

"Sometimes, authenticity and realism are at odds with interactive entertainment. For instance, Baker never has to go to the bathroom, he never has to eat and nobody in



Heavy weapons, big explosions, strong storyline, vehicles and multiplayer - *Pariah* has the lot.

It's in the blood...

PARIAH

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
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THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Extremes
PUBLISHER Hip Interactive
WEBSITE www.pariahgame.com
ETA May

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

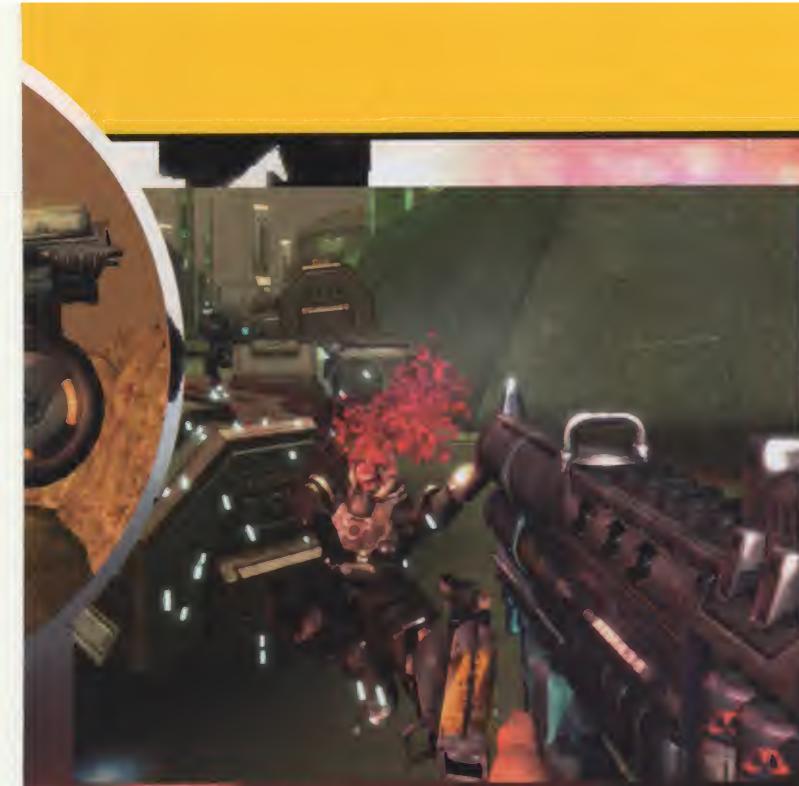
- From the developer of *Unreal* and the *UT* series
- Mature storyline and fleshed-out characters
- New multiplayer modes with Map Maker
- Vehicles and upgradeable weaponry

Jamie Sefton discovers that crash-landing on planet Earth in 2520 is bad for your health...

IF YOU'VE had your head(crabs) buried in *Half-Life 2*'s City 17 over the past few months, you may have missed our coverage of a certain little-known first-person shooter called *Pariah*. If that's the case, I'm here to slap you upside the head - the latest game from the co-developer of the *Unreal* series, Digital Extremes, has to be given the respect it deserves. Having just spent the good part of a day plasma-scorching ruthless troops, launching grenades at vicious gangs of bandits and racing across gorgeous wide-open landscapes in futuristic vehicles, I have to conclude that *Pariah* really does have the potential to be one of the great shooters of 2005.

Due for release in May, *Pariah* is a single and multiplayer blaster that aims to provide not only a visceral action-packed experience, but also fully-rounded characters, believable dialogue, and an unpredictable storyline to rival the best that Hollywood can churn out.

You play through the game as Dr Jack Mason, a medical scientist sacked from his research post for insubordination, then demoted to the life-threatening Biological Threat Assessment Unit. It's on one of these assignments, when he's helping to transport a mysterious virus-infected female security risk called Karina, that his ship is shot down and he crash-lands on a prison planet called Earth.



Tails you win, heads you lose...

"Pariah really does have the potential to be one of the great shooters of 2005"

CV



DIGITAL EXTREMES

Along with previous co-developer Epic Games, Digital Extremes has crafted some of the most popular PC shooters of all time...

1998 DE releases sci-fi FPS *Unreal* – which is acclaimed as the best-looking shooter to date.

1999 *Unreal Tournament* was a true classic and one of the best online shooters ever.

2002 *UT2003* was essentially the same game with new weapons, maps, characters, improved graphics and ragdoll physics.

2004 *UT2004* is the best in the series so far, adding vehicles and a host of outdoor maps. DE was less involved, but still contributed models and maps.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH

NEW ONLINE THRILLS GUARANTEED WITH PARIAH'S MULTIPLAYER MODES

Pariah's multiplayer component should complement the story-driven single-player action nicely, providing 16 maps (plus Map Maker levels), four vehicles, AI bots and more readily-available Weapon Energy Cores for fast upgradeable weapons. In addition to the usual Deathmatch and Capture The Flag games, Digital Extremes is introducing two new modes – Front Line Assault and Siege.

Front Line Assault mimics a front line in war, so once your team controls a point on the battlefield, the front line point moves closer to your enemy's base. When you finally push the point to the enemy base, you can destroy it and score. Siege is simply a mode where you and your team-mates have to defend a base against an onslaught of AI opponents.

Level highlights include the stunning open countryside of Mist Gully, complete with rolling hills and trees to hide behind, and the underwater base of Breakdown, with impressive reflective water effects and Captain Nemo-style views of the sea.



Pariah's multiplayer game is similar to *UT2004* – which is no bad thing.

To avoid plot-spoilers, all I'll reveal at this point is that something happens that eventually transforms Jack from a depressed medic into a walking weapon of mass destruction by the end of the game, and it's up to you to make sure he doesn't end up as just one of the year 2520's numerous premature death statistics.

GUN CONTROL

Right, let's play. I'm first thrown into the level after the transport vehicle crash on Earth, an impressively-large outdoor countryside environment, with the good doctor beginning his adventure by mending his broken body with a quick-fix from the default healing tool. Rather

like the system employed in *Halo* (or *The Chronicles Of Riddick* for that matter), your health is displayed with rechargeable coloured bars in the top left-hand corner of the screen.

Protecting the injured Karina, I pick up a hefty fast-firing gun, team up with a fellow computer-controlled male colleague and together we unleash a round of bullets into an oncoming horde of scavengers; escaped prisoners who hunt and kill stray humans to steal weapons and valuable items to survive.

The ragdoll physics are immediately evident, as a scavenger takes a stream of hot lead in his bloodied upper torso, screams, slumps to the floor and slides ungraciously down the hill towards our



"While the physics are in no way as sophisticated as *Half-Life 2*, it still never fails to amuse when you launch a grenade and watch those bodies fly"

"Come on in – the water's lovely..."

holding position. Other members of his clan duck behind rocks and trees, avoiding our crossfire in another convincing demonstration of the game's AI, before my unfortunate comrade is ambushed and killed.

If you're frustrated by *Half-Life 2*'s antiquated drop-down weapons menu, you'll lap up *Pariah*'s system – one tap of the mouse wheel brings up a radial menu with all weapons available to you in the blinking of an electronic eye. This is also where you have three slots for each of the weapons, dash time, healing tool and shield to upgrade using Weapon Energy Cores (WECs) that you discover along the way.

So, for example, the grenade launcher can add *Duke Nukem*-style remote detonation, a sniper rifle can upgrade to heat-sensing sights and the healing tool can eventually bring teammates back to life. This offers you a choice of specialising as a medic, sniper, heavy weapons expert and so on, without the cumbersome use of character classes.

BOGIES!

As an hour of hands-on action ticks by in what seems like a millisecond, I find myself getting seriously drawn into *Pariah*'s visceral universe. Another level and I'm moving between expansive scenery to gleaming man-made structures (an approximate split of 80/20 in favour of outdoor locations according



Karina picks a bogie and eats the opposition.

to Digital Extremes), causing a bout of particularly satisfying devastation as I bring down a tall destructive tower with a well-placed grenade. I then get my quaking hands on a plasma gun, which has a very cool visor effect to protect my eyes from the powerful blasts of green energy, and I aim towards a battalion of startled Mercenaries.

Pariah has four main enemy phases in its 18 levels, each with distinct and different behaviour, weaponry and appearance. You'll notice that

scavengers will often just run straight at you, overwhelming with numbers, whereas military guards will fall back and use shields to protect themselves, generally being more methodical in their tactics.

Fortunately, as in the beginning level, you're given opportunities to fight alongside AI-controlled team-mates – especially the gorgeous but pox-ridden Karina who's handy to have around in a tight spot, being able to accurately use various guns and drive vehicles. One

HOT WHEELS



PARIAH'S FOUR VEHICLES – FANCY A TEST DRIVE?

Although *Pariah*'s vehicles have some similarities to *Halo* and *UT2004*, they're still a welcome addition to the futuristic FPS. Handling is similar to *Halo*, in that you drive in the direction you move the mouse, rather than the method used in, say, *Half-Life 2* where you can shoot and move independently. Here's the lowdown...



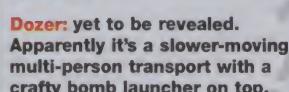
Wasp: three-wheeled bike with auto-cannons mounted on the front.



Bogie: two-passenger jeep with dual machine guns on the front and a rocket launcher on the top.



Dart: fast-moving hover vehicle with plasma guns mounted on the front.



Dozer: yet to be revealed.

Apparently it's a slower-moving

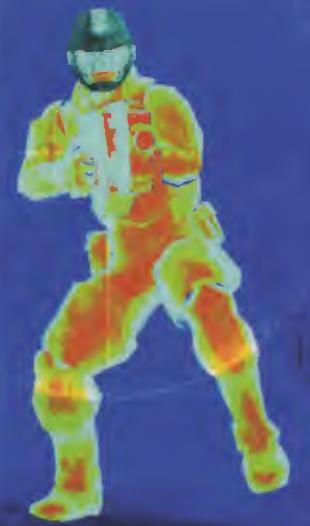
multi-person transport with a

crafty bomb launcher on top.

particularly exciting on-rails sequence aboard the Bogie – a two-passenger fully-armed jeep similar to *Halo*'s Warthog – has Karina racing along bumpy terrain, as you launch rockets with the left mouse button and shoot machine-gun rounds using alt-fire, sending enemy vehicles careering off the mud track and exploding in a brilliant display of DX9-powered pyrotechnics. Sophisticated, it ain't, but the trail of devastation you leave behind as the Bogie pulls off a GTA-style slo-mo jump from a bridge (an interesting image out of context) is sure to warm the cockles of even the most cynical gamer.

BARREL OF LAUGHS

Jack Mason has the keys to three other vehicles in the game, available in both single- and multiplayer (see 'Hot Wheels', above), although plans for any



A character's rifle's heat-sensing upgrade in action.



The Harley Davidson of the future.



Later enemies carry shields.

aerial transporters will have to wait until the planned sequel. Along the way, you'll also be able to operate powerful static gun turrets and unleash your 'secret weapon'. Nope, we're still not telling.

As the plot of *Pariah* is scripted, it's very much a linear affair. However, as you've hopefully discovered while playing *Half-Life 2*, this doesn't have to mean that levels are exactly the same every time you fire them up – especially when physics is involved. A great example of this are the large fuel barrels, which, as with every other FPS since *Doom*, explode when shot at a couple

EDIT THE WORLD

CREATE YOUR OWN MULTIPLAYER LEVELS WITH PARIAH'S MAP MAKER

Our hands-on this month revealed the latest addition to *Pariah* – a comprehensive Map Maker mode. Basically, you get access to eight custom maps that you can manipulate in real-time 3D using on-screen edit tools. Terrain enables you to inflate or deflate land on-the-fly to create hills and valleys; FX adds rain, snow, fog and wind effects; Lighting adds, ahem, lighting; Place Object gives you access to barrels, buildings and other cool stuff. When you've fiddled with your world, you can jump straight in and test it immediately and when you're happy, save it as a very small file you can swap with friends online.



You can create new online maps in a matter of minutes.

shockwave and visibly distorts the air around it when it explodes. One multiplayer level known as Breakdown takes place in an underwater base, and features some of the best water effects I've ever seen, with flooded compartments showing off beautiful reflections and cool bullet splashes.

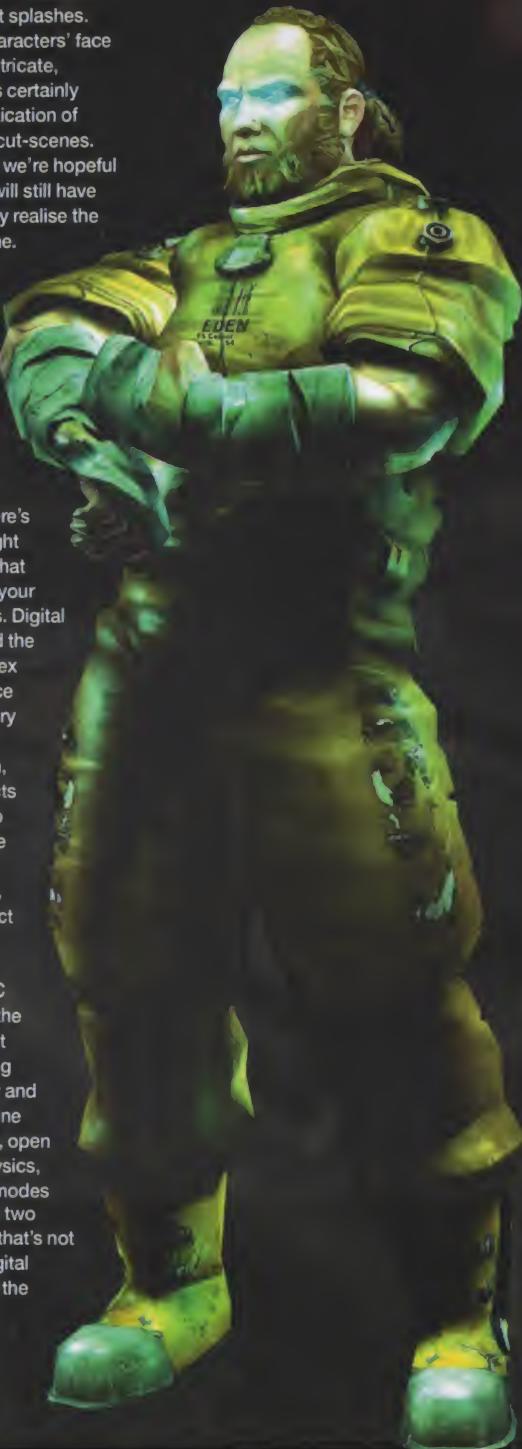
Detail on the game characters' face and clothing is suitably intricate, but the facial animation is certainly nowhere near the sophistication of the Source engine in the cut-scenes. This is disappointing, but we're hopeful that *Pariah*'s characters will still have enough expression to fully realise the game's ambitious storyline.

LEVEL-HEADED

Multiplayer – while not the main thrust of *Pariah* – is also well catered for, with 16 online maps, a full complement of bots, and various gameplay modes (see 'Battlefield Earth', p43). However, there's also a Map Editor with eight additional custom maps that you can modify to create your own *Pariah* battlegrounds. Digital Extremes hasn't designed the Map Editor to be a complex tool such as Valve's Source SDK, instead making it very user-friendly, so you can quickly manipulate terrain, objects, lighting and effects in real-time and jump in to playtest your creation (see 'Edit the World', above).

If you can't tell already, I'm excited by the prospect of *Pariah*, a mature title with the accompanying strong language (one NPC comments early on that "the f*****g scavengers will eat us alive"), blood-spattering violence, brutal weaponry and complex emotional storyline à la *Max Payne*. The large, open environments, ragdoll physics, vehicles and multiplayer modes are reminiscent of the last two *Unreal Tournaments*, but that's not surprising considering Digital Extremes' pedigree – and the comparison is hardly

unflattering. Luckily, you won't have long to find out if the talented Canadian development team has escaped to victory with its sci-fi prison Earth FPS – we'll have the exclusive review and playable demo in a few issue's time. □



of times. However, if you carefully pop a cap in them once, a leak appears, allowing you to roll the barrel down a hill towards unsuspecting enemies, set the fuel trail alight, and watch from a safe distance as the flame rushes towards the barrel and ignites it.

Barrels can also blast apart, crushing foes with lumps of debris, and can also be used to create temporary fire barriers to prevent enemies closing in on your position. While the physics are in no way as sophisticated as *Half-Life 2*, with its different materials and gravity gun, it still never fails to amuse when you launch a grenade and watch those bodies fly.

EYE CANDY

Objectives appear briefly on-screen as you progress, with missions ranging from blasting into security areas and pressing a control panel to infiltrate important buildings, to destroying homing rockets while leaping from one fast-flying craft to another against a desert backdrop.

All the maps display a great level of graphical detail such as autumnal trees raining leaves down onto the ground below and rivers splashing against rocks and banks. However, there's a fine line in special effects too, including the grenade that causes a cool green



That's one big horse.



Not the best beach landing ever.



Another mech bites the dust.

12,000 years of hurt...

EMPIRE EARTH II

Jamie Sefton makes his (small) mark on human history

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Mad Doc Software
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.empireearth.com
ETA April

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- RTS/empire-building sim sequel
- Spans 12,000 years and 14 civilisations
- New graphics engine with cool weather and environmental effects
- New single and multiplayer modes
- Mechs!



Now who lives in a house like this?

"WHY ARE you playing that?" asks our bewildered editor when he casually glances across at my monitor and catches me deftly managing my gold and tin supplies with a few taps of the mouse. I may blather on about my macho leanings towards shooters that allow you to dismember enemies with an overpowering amount of brutal weaponry, but as Woods has now discovered, I'm also perfectly happy ruling over virtual kingdoms – especially ones that allow you to blow the shit out of large futuristic robots.

Empire Earth II is the sequel to the excellent 2001 empire-building RTS, and is promising to improve on the original in, oh, at least 17 new ways. As we said in last month's mag, *EEII* has 14 civilisations (including British, German, American, Aztec and Greek), each with unique units, spanning over 12,000 years from 10,000BC to well into the future – hence my excitement at stumbling onto the mechs in the city. Each map is divided into territories that can be acquired through diplomacy or war, enabling you to expand your military, economic and/or Imperial empire.

The most obvious improvements when playing the new *Empire Earth* are the

short-cuts that enable you to get to grips with your world much quicker and with less faffy micro-management. The Citizen Manager gives you unfettered access to your units (of which there are more than 270 in the game), so you can easily group them and, for example, move all the townsfolk from wood-collection to gold-digging in seconds.

ZOOM IN

Also, a new picture-in-picture feature (shown in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen) enables you to bookmark any unit, object or location in your empire and switch instantly between them, like having numerous interactive close-circuit TV cameras. You can now easily keep tabs on large areas of territory and even issue orders without having to zoom frantically around the main map.

Other major additions are the improved 3D graphics, weather conditions that can hamper operations, improved diplomacy for forming alliances (to be broken later at your convenience), and 'non-cheating AI' – basically the computer doesn't automatically know where you are and what resources, armies or firepower you have.

Meanwhile, single-player mode is broken up into entertaining campaigns and skirmishes, with 'turning points' such as WWII's Operation Overlord and scenarios that include the soon-to-be-famous USA Cyborg Insurrection of 2058. Multiplayer is included too, with the usual Deathmatch and King of the Hill modes accompanied by Quickstart, which is great if you're impatient to get on with the action. There's also Sole Survivor, where you can make alliances with other players, knowing that you're eventually going to have to screw them over to win the game – if you're a fan of *Risk*, you'll love this mode.

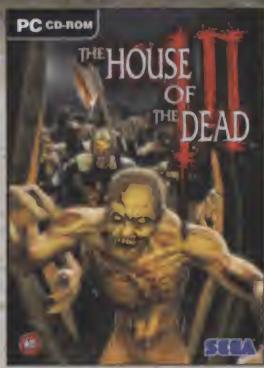
SHIP-SHAPE

With a few months to release, there are still a few bugs to iron out in this early code, including the quirky ship movement, which unfortunately turned my Normandy landings into a new Pearl Harbour. However, developer Mad Doc appears to be crafting a complex, yet hugely playable strategy epic that as well as giving you access to classic civilisations such as the Aztecs, puts your despotic finger on the nuclear trigger. And it has robots – did I mention that? 

PC CD-ROM

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The only good Zombie
is a dead Zombie



OUT NOW



THE HOUSE
OF
THE DEAD™



Non-lethal takedowns are preferred in SWAT 4.



"Eat justice old woman!"



A gust of wind disrupts PC ZONE's cash pile.

At least my eyes are safe.

**THE DETAILS**

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.swat4.com
ETA April

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Squad-based urban shooter with an emphasis on proper police procedure
- Non-lethal takedowns with beanbag shotguns and pepper ball rifles
- Sniper windows provide added tactical element
- Sophisticated squad AI

No flies on this... SWAT 4

Paul 'excessive force' Presley loads up on the beanbags and pepper balls and prepares to slice the pie. Mmmm... Pie...

CV**IRRATIONAL GAMES**

Brought in to rescue the SWAT franchise from disaster, Irrational has quite the track record...

1997 Irrational forms, with Ken Levine taking the brightest and best from Looking Glass Studios.

1999 The team's first major project – System Shock 2 – proves to be the best thing since sliced bread.

2002 Freedom Force does a respectable job for the still under-exploited superhero genre.

2004 Irrational's Australian arm brings cheer to the online community with Tribes: Vengeance. Meanwhile, the Boston branch is handed the keys to SWAT 4 following the cancellation of SWAT: Urban Justice.

I'VE BEEN on the job for less than ten minutes and already I've electrocuted an elderly woman into unconsciousness in the name of justice. Yes, you're either SWAT or you're not, although I doubt pumping several gazillion kilowatts of spark juice into senior citizens was quite what Samuel L Jackson had in mind when he said it.

Nevertheless, 2005 appears to be the year of the non-lethal takedown as far as the socially responsible souls at Irrational Games are concerned. Brought in to put the SWAT series back on course following complaints about the aborted SWAT: Urban Justice's 'gun-ho, kill-first-read-rights-later' approach by the real-life Special Weapons And Tactics merchandising division (or someone), Irrational has totally reshaped things.

Or rather, it's put things back the way they were in SWAT 3 – ultra-faithful police procedures and an emphasis on

arresting suspects rather than easing the overcrowding situation in the nation's jails through judicious use of bullet placement. What's more, it's also boosted the visuals and gameplay mechanics to bring things in line with current FPS genre thinking.

ZERO TOLERANCE

The old lady in question was just one such suspect to feel the wrath of my arsenal of incapacitation tools. Of course, the SWAT 4 arsenal includes as fine an array of the world's life-takers as any contemporary-set FPS. These include pistols, shotguns, rifles, semi-automatics and so on, along with a more intriguing selection of gas grenades, pepper-ball guns (that look a lot like the paintball guns that busy executives manhandle in various forests at weekend team-bonding exercises), tasers and beanbag shotguns. Away from the firing range, you also get

gadgets such as door wedges and the Opti-Wand, a telescopic camera used for peering round corners, under doors and up skirts. I expect.

In practice, you'd think that everyone would just eschew such novelties after one or two uses, but the game practically encourages their use, judging mission successes on the amount of people still breathing (even if through a haze of pepper spray) at the end of proceedings. Too much excessive force



"The atmosphere is 50 per cent sneaking around corners and biting your nails, 50 per cent all-out chaos"



"Sarge, we've been here for half an hour. I think they took the lift."

Backstage at the London Fashion Show and the models were getting nervous.

without authorisation though, and you'll like as not find yourself up on criminal charges yourself.

Combined with the realistic simulation of these weapons, it has the unusual effect in-game of making fire-fights incredibly tense affairs. You spend as much time ducking for cover and praying for backup as you do shooting at targets. A downside with the engine we were shown was that not a great

amount of the scenery was destructible. Following the delights of *Half-Life 2*'s physics engine (in which everything appears to be made out of coiled springs), this paints things in a more simplistic light than we were hoping for.

FILTH AND SCUM

Still, it's more than made up for by the atmosphere, which is 50 per cent sneaking around corners and biting your

fingernails, 50 per cent all-out chaos when battle is joined. Particularly nice is the option to intimidate rather than shoot opponents, bellowing at them to surrender and drop their weapons, or firing warning shots into the nearby air (or their less vital limbs) in the hope they fill their trousers and give up like a baby. One tactic I found effective was to sneak up on a suspect, shoot the gun out of his hands and then leap out en masse yelling at him to eat linoleum.

Missions vary from simple barricaded suspects (wife-beaters, armed robbers and so on), warrant serving (which seemed to be more of the same, except

on unsuspecting goons) and hostage rescuing, all of which provide plenty to keep the average bobby on the beat happy, especially with the diverse locations. Some, such as the kiddie-fiddling paedo who'd locked a young girl in a filthy dungeon, were particularly grim, but all the more involving for it.

NOTHING TO SEE HERE

One area that was still roped off behind yellow police tape was the multiplayer game. A restricted multiplayer beta test recently showed off a single VIP map, an interesting take on the hostage rescue gaming mode. It included SWAT





Shoot first, ask questions later.



Lionel Richie is arrested for dancing on the ceiling.



"Please, I was only trying to sell encyclopedias!"



"Remove the bomb from under your jumper and step away."

members having to escort a random unarmed player to an extraction point, and Suspect players having to kidnap rather than kill the player, forcing the use of non-lethal hardware, coordinated teamwork and much swearing from the hapless VIP player as he constantly gets gassed, zapped and interfered with.

Sounds convoluted, but the surprising thing is that it appeared to work. Or at least it did when there was any kind of active server besides a passworded French one with a lone *terroriste* wandering around marvelling at *les graphiques*. Even with just four players, it was quite the tense affair, if a more slow-paced one than online shootists are traditionally used to.

A FRIEND IN NEED

The real test for *SWAT 4*'s multiplayer chances is likely to be the cooperative mode. Whether playing through the existing missions as is, or – by unlocking the maps as you go – adjusting them through the mission builder to include as many suspects and civilians as you see fit, *SWAT*'s tactical leanings lend themselves more readily to co-op gaming than most shooters. Providing you can find friends who're willing to take your orders to "Breach, Bang and Clear" seriously when uttered in your distinctly unauthoritative tones.

Those commands are much improved on *SWAT*'s last outing. The context-sensitive menus are simple to

negotiate and provide just about every tactical option you can ask for. Splitting your team into two elements proves particularly effective in larger situations, and the helmet camera views are greatly enhanced since *SWAT 3*, giving limited real-time control over your squad-mates.

In addition, the much vaunted sniper mode offers yet more control over your environment, showing bad guy movement in remote areas of the map and letting you pick off potential troublemakers before they know you're on the scene.

All of this can be handled manually or by putting yourself in the hands of the game's AI, which might be a trepidatious prospect were it not for the fact that by and large, your team seems to be well trained for the job. Orders are carried out with the minimum of fuss and, usually, the maximum of efficiency. Things only seem to go wrong when you personally have failed to plan things out thoroughly enough. Or, in my case, when my badly-aimed gas grenades bounce off the door frame and land in the middle of my team, causing us all to have the kind of coughing fit

usually

seen by asthmatics at a cat fur factory.

More than just a novelty for uniform fetishists then? Potentially, yes. Especially in multiplayer. When *Splinter Cell* tried to shake up the way we fight each other last year, it was a noble effort that failed to take off (imagine Paula Radcliffe trying out pole vaulting and you get the idea). Simply catering for more than four players helps – co-op enables five of you pretend to be American, while the other modes cater for 16 players. However, the balance between stealth

and action is where the real magic will happen, by recreating as much of the single-player game's tension and atmosphere as possible while providing traditional multiplayer combat thrills.

And that single-player game? If the physics engine can get a bit of a tweak here and there to provide a greater feeling of realism (the game's *raison d'être* after all), it should have the tactical shooter genre sewn up. Or clapped in irons. Or some other police-based pun. □

"JIGGERS, IT'S THE FUZZ"

HOW TIMES CHANGE IN THE WACKY WORLD OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

It's an oft-overlooked trivia titbit that the *SWAT* series evolved out of a long-forgotten text-input adventure series. *Police Quest: In Pursuit Of The Death Angel* was just one of Sierra's long-running *Quest* range of adventure titles back in the '80s, and tried to present as accurate a picture of real-life policing as it could with 16-colour graphics and mono-speaker sound. At least it did until *Police Quest 2: The Vengeance*, when the developer decided to go all *Miami Vice* and roped in a Hollywood-style narrative about a serial-killer and tacked a simplistic love story on the end.

Police Quest 3: The Kindred continued the cod-Hollywood dramatics, while the fourth (Darryl F Gates' *Police Quest: Open Season*) was a bizarre affair experimenting with photo-realistic graphics.

The *SWAT* series started with *Police Quest 5* (aka Darryl F Gates' *Police Quest: SWAT*), but was more of a reaction-guessing game, like taking a driving theory test about shooting people. At which point the adventure game genre died, so *Police Quest: SWAT 2* took the unusual step of becoming an isometric *Commandos*-style strategy game.

Sanity prevailed by the time we came to *SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle* and the seeds of *SWAT 4*'s FPS-antics were planted.



Is this man a real policeman?



AMERICAN MCGEE
PRESENTS

SCRAPLAND



"...MAKINGS OF A CULT CLASSIC..."

PCZONE


DEEP SILVER

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That's one way to conserve heat.



Diplomacy and trade play major roles in the main Campaign.

Size isn't everything...

COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

Martin Korda raises a glass of vodka to a returning war hero...

FOUR LONG years. That's how long we've been waiting for a proper sequel to one of the most innovative RTS games of recent times, *Cossacks: European Wars*. But come April, that wait should be coming to a bloody end, thanks to the release of *Napoleonic Wars*.

The title is somewhat misleading though, as the game won't be solely focused around the martial exploits of a 5ft-nothing egotistical Frenchman. Instead, you'll be able to take control of numerous 19th century European nations (including Bonaparte's lot of course), and lead them off to dominate the continent.

"Fatigue and morale have a big impact on the gameplay, which is a key difference to the original game," explains Oleg Yavorsky, product manager at GSC

Gameworld. "There are also a variety of tactical tricks, a simplified economic system and very few upgrades. This should enable you to focus more on combat and to defeat stronger opponents through the skillful use of strategy, location and timing. We've also added a global map to the Campaign mode."

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

So, a more strategic experience awaits, one that'll hopefully meld the epic battles of the first game with the kind of realistic tactics found in the likes of *Rome: Total War*. Plus, with GSC claiming that its new engine can pump out vast levels of detail, including battles featuring 64,000 troops, over 1,000 types of flora and fauna and shader-based water, we could be in for a visual treat as well as a strategic one – although to date, we've yet to be entirely convinced by the game's visuals.

But let's talk more about the campaign map, which sounds like it could take *Cossacks*' gameplay to an all-new freeform level. "There'll be a tutorial with a linear storyline to teach you how to use the interface, controls and each troop type. The tutorial's missions will be varied and hugely different from each other and are set to include tasks like eliminating artillery with chasseurs squads, so the

main forces can successfully advance on a particular front," explains Oleg.

"The main campaign is non-linear and there's only one goal – to conquer Europe. To do so, you need to combine the tactical tricks learnt in the tutorial, along with the extensive use of diplomacy, economy, trade and sabotage acts. It's totally up to you to decide where your army moves to in the next turn."

PROMISES, PROMISES

Sounds great so far. Now add plans for AI to intelligently utilise its surroundings and combine arms to outsmart you – as well as a host of units, each with its own stats for health, morale, armament, defence, hit power, shot power and shot distance – and it's hard to argue that *Cossacks II* lacks promise. It has oodles of it.

Of course, whether it'll deliver is another matter, but the portents are good, especially as GSC has a reputation for developing and producing innovative titles. Well, apart from the dire, amateurish



Come in, comrades...

and clearly rushed *Alexander* of course. But nobody's perfect, right?

So, with a bit of luck, come April, all of us strategy fans will be wreaking havoc across Europe in a rampage of megalomania, after which we'll come home, sup back some warm milk laced with Stolichnaya and have loads of fun repeating the feat in *Cossacks II*. Sounds good to me.

"The main campaign is non-linear and there's only one goal – to conquer Europe"

OLEG YAVORSKY PRODUCT MANAGER AT GSC GAMEWORLD

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER GSC Gameworld
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.cossacks2.de
ETA April 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Battles featuring up to 64,000 troops
- Features both freeform and linear campaigns
- Utilises realistic tactics
- Potentially lifelike AI





You control units using voice commands.



The lead character in *Will Of Steel* is William Steel. Clever stuff.

He's not very bendy...



WILL OF STEEL

Michael Filby barks orders at his troops, who singularly ignore him...

A big plane, yesterday.



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gameus
PUBLISHER GMX
WEBSITE www.willofsteel.com
ETA February 24

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Action centred on real-world conflicts
- Control interface incorporates voice recognition
- Variable weather effects include full-on sandstorms
- Title is a double-entendre waiting to happen



Nice formation lads.

GEORGE W BUSH may well be a bit of a comedy president, but at least his alarming use of the word as his own personal game of *Risk* has provided games developers with plenty of new source material to base their games on. *Will Of Steel* is the latest effort intended to give you a taste of the war-on-terror from the comfort of your bedroom.

Specifically, the single-player campaign is split between the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the early stages of the current Iraq war. You follow the antics of a certain William Steel (geddit?) of the United States Marine Corps. As well as being thankful that his father didn't name him Dick, William's duties are to kick some terrorist proverbial over the course of around 16 missions.

This all paves the way for some frantic RTS action, with the focus on shifting your units around, as there's no resource collecting or base-building to be found here. Among the 100 or so units are all the usual suspects, such as Cayuse helicopters and a cornucopia of tanks

and armoured vehicles, as well as some more specialised units. The latter include medics ready to slap a band-aid onto the knees of your wounded soldiers, and some multi-talented engineer units who, as well as being able to fix up your vehicles, can perform a wealth of useful tasks such as detecting and diffusing mines, capturing enemy vehicles and placing explosive charges.

You're also promised a system whereby you're awarded promotions depending upon your performance. Do the job like a pro, and the promotions you're given will unlock special abilities to use in later missions. These include passive abilities such as satellite reconnaissance and, of course, some good old-fashioned fiery death from above, courtesy of artillery support and air strikes.

SPEAK UP

What developer Gameus is really hoping will set its desert combat apart from the rest is the addition of voice recognition. With the aid of the microphone that's planned to be bundled with the game, the idea is to bark out various orders to select

and control your units. We have to admit to not being fully sold on this idea at the moment though, as when it was demonstrated to us at a preview event, the early code had considerable difficulty in recognising many commands. We're also less than convinced about the usefulness of speaking a command, waiting a few seconds for it to display, then tapping a key to confirm while in the heat of battle. Of course, the final code may yet prove us wrong.

PRETTY PRETTY

Voice recognition aside, the technical aspects seem to be shaping up quite nicely. Built around a proprietary 3D engine, the preview code we've played is up to spec aesthetically. We were also pleased to see that the enemy AI had a few tricks up its sleeve, such as outnumbered units adopting hit-and-run tactics. Indeed, it's the success of these aspects of the game rather than the voice recognition that's set to ultimately determine how *Will Of Steel* measures up to the competition. We'll bring you the definitive verdict next month. **PCZ**



You can now fire weapons and drop grenades out of windows.

No dirt bikes are in evidence - *Joint Ops* has that market cornered.

The mother of all battles...

BATTLEFIELD 2

EA is about to drop a bomb on online gaming, and Anthony Holden is sitting astride and screaming all the way

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.eagames.com
ETA March 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Modern-day sequel to ace online shooter
- Sturdy new graphics engine
- Improved team structure with squads and team commander
- Commander plays from RTS overview
- Built-in voice communication

THE MORE we play *Battlefield 2*, the more familiar it seems. We had another chance to try our hand at the big-budget sequel on a recent visit to EA's Chertsey studios, and we're now even more convinced that *Battlefield 2* is in fact *Battlefield: Desert Combat* with better graphics. If you're a fan of the popular Gulf War mod, this is great news; and if you've never played it before, you're in for a real treat. EA certainly has experience with big-license games, and although this

isn't *FIFA*, the kits have certainly been updated to match the latest fixtures in the Middle East.

While it's too early to say whether *Battlefield 2* might be too similar to previous games, the core gameplay of *Battlefield 2* is identical to that of *Battlefield 1942* and *Desert Combat* (*BF: Vietnam* being something of a tangent). Even new features such as the Commander mode, where one player from each team can view the battle from

an overhead RTS perspective, don't fundamentally change the game. Indeed, we've had a good crack at the Commander mode, and you're actually quite limited in how you can affect the battle. Sure, you can launch the occasional artillery round, but your most effective power is to issue orders to squad leaders. Knowing how cooperative online gamers tend to be, we can't help but think



Character classes have different sprint times and armour ratings.



Better than Airwolf.





Three of the 12 new maps concentrate on urban fighting.



DICE

Formed in the early '90s by three schoolkids, Digital Illusions CE is now one of the most respected developers in the world (or at least it was, until EA swallowed the company whole in 2004.) DICE cut its teeth on pinball games, later moving into racing and kids' titles, before finally breaking into military action in 1999 with the proto-*Battlefield*, *Codename: Eagle*. Here are some recent highlights...

2002 Battlefield 1942
RallySport Challenge
Pryzm (PS2)
Secret Agent Barbie (GBA)

2003 BF 1942: Road To Rome
BF 1942: Secret Weapons Of WWII
Midtown Madness 3 (Xbox)

2004 Battlefield Vietnam
RallySport Challenge 2 (Xbox)

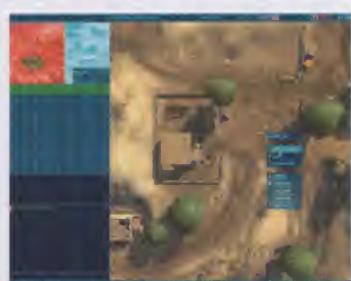
this is a feature only clan gamers will truly make the most of.

REAL PURDY

On the other hand though, there is one major difference: *Battlefield 2* looks

"The levels in BF2 look extremely tasty, plus there's more variety, with many new styles of play emerging"

stunning. The custom graphics engine brings the game up to similar levels of detail as you see in offline shooters, which is extraordinary in a game of such scope. The new physics engine also makes for a far more interactive environment, though it does have to be a bit selective. Too many loose physics objects would bring your server to a standstill, while too many destructible items would allow players to



Commander mode in action.

lay waste to the carefully crafted levels. As it is, you can shoot through walls and blow up bridges, which is good enough for me.

SPANNERS AT THE READY

On top of this, the gameplay has been tweaked in a million places, tightening up and balancing something that was already superb. So, you've got two new combat kits (spec ops and support), advanced weaponry such as heat-seeking missiles, a new sprint function and a new medal and rankings system.

What's more, a huge amount of effort has been put into



encouraging teamplay and tactics, with a squad system, the aforementioned commander role and a small set of command options.

We were dubious at first as to the appeal of such a formal command structure, but after extended play, we're now totally convinced. For one, the fact that you can select your squad leader as a respawn point is a stroke of genius, and

ELECTRIC SHOCK THERAPY



DICE is devising devious ways to kill enemies.

BATTLEFIELD 2 TAKES HUMILIATION TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

Humiliation kills have been part of the FPS landscape since the birth of the deathmatch. Whether by gauntlet, fist or steel, killing someone with a weapon intended for emergencies has always been a great way of bringing your opponent to tears. In *Battlefield 2*, the designers have stumbled upon a whole new set of humiliations, or 'elite kills', that are set to make knife kills look positively old hat.

At DICE, the current favourite is the 'defib'. As a medic, you now carry a defibrillator for reviving freshly fallen comrades, but as a side effect, it can also be used to electrocute the living – with hilarious results. Another favourite is the C4 kill. The new spec ops kit includes satchels of plastic explosives that can be stuck to targets and remotely detonated – including people. Load someone with C4 while their back is turned, wait for them to wander off and join a squad, and then boom – squad dismissed.

But perhaps the most crushing blow of all can be dealt from the Commander's seat. Playing in this role, you can drop supply crates to help your team-mates, or, if you spot a lone sniper lurking on a hilltop, crush someone to death. It's tricky to pull off, but it's sure to give you bragging rights for days to come.

means that lone wolf players are at a serious disadvantage. On top of this, the communication functions in the game are excellent. Not only is voiceover IP built right into the engine, but the context-sensitive 'commo rose' – a radial pop-up command menu similar to Raven Shield – is set to improve team cooperation hugely.

But perhaps the biggest difference

Vietnam they were typically dense jungle or swampland. Buildings were sparingly placed, with urban combat mostly avoided.

NOT LIKE THAT, LIKE THIS...

Battlefield 2 is a very different story. Not only are the new levels looking extremely tasty, the amount of variety has increased dramatically, with many new styles of play emerging. One of the Chinese levels is called Songhua Stalemate. It's a swampy, fog-shrouded affair with a foreshortened field of vision, which immediately determines the type of action you see. Vehicles are weighted towards small, fast vessels, encouraging swift infantry attacks over large-scale vehicular assaults, and sniping is out of the question.

Another map, Divided City, focuses on close-quarters urban combat within a heavily built-up area.

There's a key hold-point in an exposed central square, and the importance of sniper cover and air support are immediately apparent.

Basically, the gameplay is going to be far broader – not to mention more tactical – than ever before, and this is where *Battlefield 2* shows its strength. *Desert Combat* with better graphics it may be, but we all know this is exactly what the fans want. The resulting game, while not a revolution, can't fail to be great.



Max who? No, I'm John Constantine, arsehole.

Straight to hell...

CONSTANTINE

Cigarettes, alcohol and battling demons? Just another weekend in the life of *Dave Woods*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Bits Studios
PUBLISHER SCI
WEBSITE www.bitsstudios.com
ETA March 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Extremely dark and twisted
- Superior story from the film of the same name
- Based on one of the best comic book characters ever
- Guaranteed to wind up the anti-smoking brigade

CIGARETTES are dying a death. From the glory days of Hollywood of old, where non-smokers were either children or deeply uncool, tabs have been vilified and removed from advertising hoardings, racing cars and even pubs. What's the world coming to?

Thank the Lord then for John Constantine, a chain-smoking detective who first appeared in a bit part in *Swamp Thing*, but who went on to get his own starring vehicle, *Hellblazer*. Both of these were penned by the great Alan 'Watchmen' Moore, which gives you some idea of the pedigree. And guess what? He's now got his own computer game, which faithfully replicates the big-

screen Hollywood version which should be hitting multiplexes in March.

WHEEZE

The opening cut-scene in the game is a frame-by-frame remake of the opening scene of the film, and the very first thing you see, in super-close-up, is a smouldering cigarette. This could be the positive publicity smokers need to... What's that? John

Constantine has terminal lung cancer? For the second time? Arse.

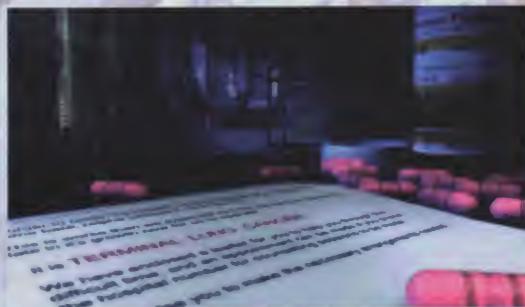
How can you get terminal cancer a second time? Well, the first time round Constantine made a pact with the devil (or devils) for his soul. You see, it turns out there are three of them, and when he was 'claimed' none of them could agree who would take him and he was spat back down to Earth to resume his bad habits. This time around though, Hell wants him and Heaven won't take him, and Constantine is trying to worm his way back onto the righteous path by devoting his time to thwarting demons on Earth.

And, as it's demons you're up against, the standard third-person arsenal has been tweaked to include the Holy Shotgun (like a shotgun but it fires crucifix-shaped shells), the Witch's

YOU'VE BEEN FRAMED

IT'S LIKE GOING TO THE CINEMA WITHOUT PAYING FOR A TICKET

It's a technique that we wouldn't advise for a big-screen remake (if only Gus Van Sant thought the same), but if you're making the game of the film of the graphic novel, it makes sense to rip the opening scene of the film and reproduce it frame by frame for the game's intro. In one of the best FMV openers we've seen, the Keanu Reeves-a-like smokes a fag, rids a woman of her demons and shows us that his world isn't one you'd want to share. Terminal lung cancer is the least of his worries. As an introduction to the Constantine character for *Hellblazer* virgins, it's about as good as it gets.



Terminal lung cancer and a lady only Wayne Rooney would consider. No fun.



"This could be the positive publicity smokers need to... What's that? John Constantine has terminal lung cancer? Arse"



The Old Testament. Like... Awesome.

automatically when you approach a gap. As time is pressing (the film gets released in the UK in March) it's doubtful whether any of these issues will be addressed.

But, while it's definitely a game that's going to sit better on consoles than the PC, *Constantine* can't be dismissed as just a dismal cash-in. The dark and twisted *Hellblazer* universe is long due a PC outing, and the Constantine character is roughly 100 times better than any of the creations you've had to endure over the years. The only major problem I foresee is that as the game follows the threads of the movie, once you've seen that, it isn't going to present you with any major surprises. Having said that early reports of the film are good, and after getting to grips with some of the foibles present in the preview code, our report is that it could well have enough in it beyond the heritage of *Hellblazer* to make it worth a look. Find out if we're right in next month's review. □

CV

bits
studios

BITS STUDIOS

Bits Studios might be a relatively new name to the PC, but it's been around the block a few times, with over 20 years of experience and over 30 titles to its name.

2002 *Die Hard Vendetta* is a big release, hitting the major consoles. Does a decent enough job of translating the actions of the shoeless wonder.

2005 SCI hopes *Constantine* does the business on the big screen and leads to stunning sales for its copycat game. Fag sales rise steadily.

Curse (pistols that fire stones from the road to Damascus), the Dragon's Breath (a flame-thrower that uses bile from the stomachs of dragons) and Holy Water bombs, which act as your secondary fire. And before you fall about laughing, all of these weapons actually figure in the *Hellblazer* world. The only original creation is the Crucifier, which – ah, you've already guessed – fires nails from crucified markers.

COUGH

The game kicks off in Constantine's apartment (conveniently fitted with a Holy Water sprinkler system), where you

You don't even know you're born etc etc...

get to practise the rudimentary spellcasting system by following sequences played out on screen. To give you a fair chance of getting one of these off in the heat of battle, time slows down slightly (as it does if you employ the 180-degree spin turn, that enables you to come at demons from behind). Unfortunately, it's the only nod you'll find

to *Max Payne*, which is still the definitive example of how to craft a third-person shooter. By comparison, *Constantine* looks like it might sport too many limitations – the game is extremely linear, but full of console quirks and not always consistent. So you can climb over certain objects in the world, but not others, and jumping happens

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MEET THEM AND BEAT THEM

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

MULTI-FORMAT



ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

Right. I reckon we're far enough into the new year now for one of my rants. What is it this time, you may ask? What is it that's causing me much grinding of wisdom teeth and pulling of grade-two hair? Well, it's this: why is it that PC games have as big a slice of the market as consoles, and yet videogame publishers seem intent on producing less original titles for us?

Last year was probably the best we've ever had for PC games, but I'm getting concerned that more and more developers are being forced to dumb-down their wares by publishers, in order to make porting their titles to PlayStation 2, GameCube and Xbox (or whatever's around the corner) much easier.

Biggest disappointment of last year? *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. How did the sequel to one of the best games ever made become such a non-event? Eidos and Ion Storm were probably convinced that by developing across Xbox and PC, they would bring the franchise to a bigger audience. Instead, they ended up alienating *Deus Ex*'s fanatical PC fans with a simpler product, while singularly failing to make any impression to the fickle console-buying herd.

Our cover review game *Star Wars: Republic Commando* (page 66) is another case in point. LucasArts' latest is a solid, enjoyable shooter, but you just instinctively know that it could have been so much better if it'd just ignored the Xbox.

OK, OK, there is a place for the cross-format title - *PES4*, *KOTOR*, *Max Payne 2* and *Halo: Combat Evolved* are just four genuine crackers. However, if the PC is going to keep innovating and pushing videogame design forward as it has done for the past 15 years, companies need to remember that you can't produce a truly ground-breaking PC title with one hand on a Sony DualShock 2. Roll on *F.E.A.R.*, *Black & White 2*, *Quake IV*...



STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO 66

Send in the clones! Check out our exclusive review of LucasArts' trooper shooter.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig - the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?

DAVE WOODS

Far Cry (again), PES4

2. What would you get up to if you could clone yourself?

I'd find out for myself if I'm really that bad in bed

JAMIE SEFTON

Pariah, Second Sight, Half-Life 2

I would play Counter-Strike against all my clones. And lose



HEARTS OF IRON II
They don't like it up 'em



INDIE ZONE
Sound of the underground



REPLAY
Play it again, but for less



REALITY CHECK
Steve Hill gets behind the wheel

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

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IN A HEAD-ON CAR CRASH



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PAUL PRESLEY

*EverQuest II, World Of Warcraft
and Star Wars Galaxies*

Be twice as brilliant. Or would
that be half as brilliant...



WILL PORTER

*Republic Commando, Psi-Ops,
Max Payne 2*

Get a bigger house



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Half-Life 2, budget games

Create an army of weaklings
and fail spectacularly to
conquer the galaxy



MARTIN KORDA

The Matrix Online

Utterly deplete the world's
beef supplies



STEVE HILL

*UEFA Champions League
(surprisingly)*

Force my clones to do
freelance so I can watch
more *Countdown*



RICHIE SHOEMAKER

*Planetside: Aftershock,
Hearts Of Iron II*

About 11ft 2-inches

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

£34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: LucasArts | ETA: March 4 | www.lucasarts.com/games/swrepubliccommando

REQUIRES PIII 1MHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESires** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128 MB 3D card

One of our many Will Porter clones dons Republican armour, while the others carry on making tea, bless 'em...



"BETTER RELOAD

"Gordon!" Yes, yes I know. "I'm with you Gordon!" Yes, well come along then. Excuse me, do you mind if I just squeeze past? Thanks, yes these stairs are rather narrow. "Better reload Gordon!" Yes, yes, come along now – have we left anyone behind? Barney? Barney! Barney Calhoun where are you going? What did I say about wandering away from the group? There are combine laser-trip mines all over this

Jewel, what would I tell your parents? No Barney! No! Not over there – aggh! No! No! KABOOM! ARGH! Sorry Gordon. I'll get out of your way."

Squad mechanics are a tricky business, that's for sure. Even the mightiest of heavyweights like *Half-Life 2* (in my miserable opinion at least) came unstuck more than a few times in its otherwise stellar closing chapters. In fact, it's hard to think of a recent shooter of the 'mindless fun' variety (so not including the *SWATs* and *Flashpoints* of this world) that manages to come even close to creating the illusion that your squad are real people, or even invented people who can be given an ounce of trust or responsibility.

Republic Commando however, for its several sins, comes closer than any other 'mindless' squad shooter to

creating a believable, cohesive and character-infused unit for you to order about. At times it may be a basic jaunt, and a game whose Xbox leanings are more than apparent, but in terms of squad dynamics it pretty much pisses all over its peers in the 'dumbed-down tactics brigade' – most notably *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* and the mysteriously popular *Conflict* series. What's more, it's also a *Star Wars* game, and a Nu-*Star Wars* game at that, thereby officially making it the greatest *Episode I-III* gaming release ever – an achievement much akin to winning a football match in which the opposing team are all drunk and blind, or are the Milton Keynes Dons.

FRESH START

Republic Commando kicks off a couple of hours after the close of *Attack Of The Clones*

and finishes off with the build-up to *Revenge Of The Sith* – even giving the faithful a glimpse of the film's jedi/droid chief badman General Grievous in the game's closing levels. There are three campaigns: bug-battering on Geonosis; a series of missions that see you dealing with an unhealthy situation in which some juvenile delinquent Trandoshans have found a Republic Assault Ship with the keys in the ignition; and a prolonged stay on the wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk, fighting against the combined Separatist forces laughing it up alongside some absolutely goliath fuzzballs.

Your squad are of the same *Predator/Navy Seals/Aliens* heritage that you've seen many times before, even if they've been wrapped in Lucas swaddling clothes. You and

your squad have all developed personalities that belie your common genetic heritage – although the key differences still remain in either how much they enjoy killing (a little or a lot), along with their favoured means of dispatch for troublemakers, whether through sniping, heavy weapons or general shootage.

CLONE ZONE

For reasons unknown, you're the only one with Temeura Morrison's gravelly voice. Your fellow clones, meanwhile, are known by both serial code and nickname, and it soon becomes apparent that 07 (Sev), 40 (Fixer) and 62 (Scorch) are pleasant and clever enough to give the game some momentum, even in its lowest ebbs.

Basic as they are, until you work out the squad dynamics *Republic Commando* never

IN PERSPECTIVE

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 75%
The *Hitman* people provide a squad-shooter with even less tactics, but almost an equivalent amount of fun.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 78%
Coddles better than the on-off Naboo 1942 effort, even if you get to play co-operatively.



really comes into its own; and unfortunately, the training mission based in the *Episode II* arena is decidedly skimpy in explaining the exact 'wheres' and 'hows' of what's pretty much the game's most important feature. General commands for your squad are delivered via the first four function keys and, unlike in *Pacific Assault*, when you order your clones to get in line, push forward or secure a certain area you genuinely see your will put into motion.

The intelligence on show isn't too bad either. For some reason though, my lot could hardly ever get to grips with the notion that





Geonosians are vicious and full of yellow bug goo.

Your childhood development is seen through flashbacks.

gun turrets aren't necessarily the best things to stand next to. However apart from this, scripted nudges and squad AI are enough to have your men taking cover, healing themselves and moving in formation to a reasonably self-sufficient extent.

Squad tactics don't end there though. As you progress through the myriad of alien corridors, vents and hangars of the game, you start to come

across points that the Gaming-God-on-High has decreed are excellent for sniping, grenadeing or heavy weapon action. It's your duty to then assign a man

at these sign-posted points and he'll merrily provide cover for you and your other men to scurry around hacking into terminals and putting holes in droids in a more freeform style.

If all this sounds simple,

then that's because it is. It's stupidly simple, and if you keep on getting mulleder, then it's very often because you haven't found one of these nearby action spots.

NICE 'N' EASY DOES IT

If you're trained in worthier, more tactical, squad games, you may find it all far too basic. However, it still remains a streamlined system that works, not least because it forces you to put faith in your AI cohorts. It also urges you through a pre-defined tactical path that may not give much scope for

In a similar fashion, you and your men can get up to all manner of trickery – hacking into terminals, setting explosives, breaching doors with grenades, defusing mines and the like. The more important the task is, the longer it generally takes – so providing cover for a fellow clone beavering away at a terminal (or indeed listening to the ruckus around you and working up a sweat while you are the aforementioned beaver) is a regular event. In fact, the points at which your squad system shines the brightest are when

"Republic Commando is guilty of many things, but the salvation comes in the detail"

improvisation, but does allow for some revaluation and quick-thinking when your men start crumpling and valuable tactical advantages are lost.

By the time you're blasting Trandoshan slavers in the hangars of the second chapter, an area may contain 10-15 potential points where you could assign your men. The challenge is to work out the best order to select them in, working your way through the area and securing the room.

droid dispensers continually pump out enemies while you try to destroy everything that emerges, while a comrade spends ten achingly long seconds attaching an explosive charge to stem the flow.

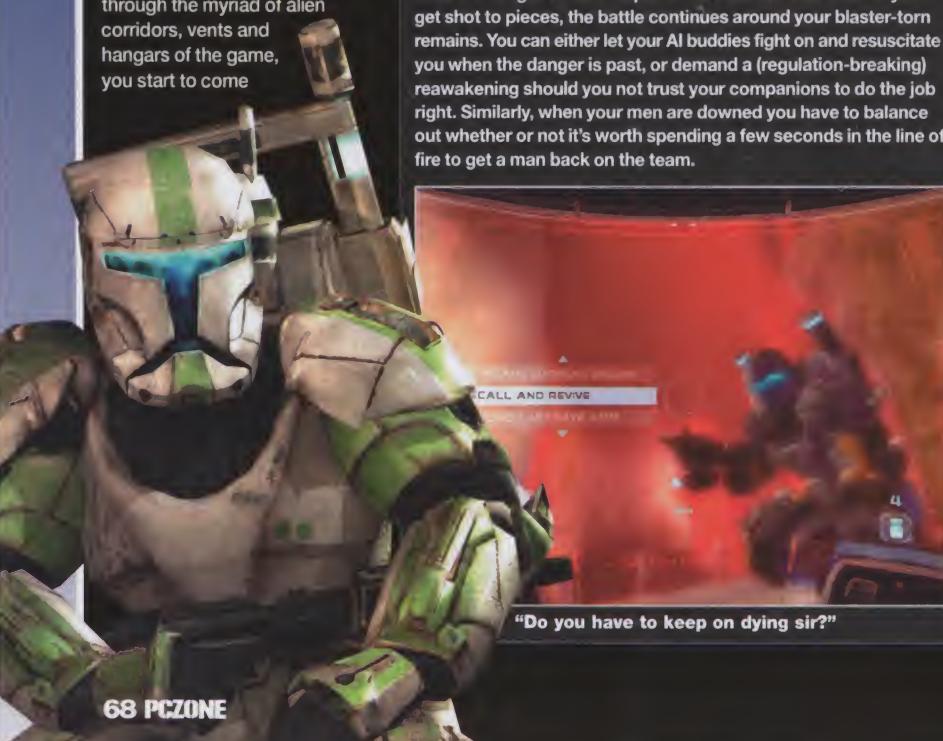
Enemies themselves are fun to shoot, if limited in variation – perhaps constrained by the need to keep everything in relation to the Separatist forces seen in *Episodes II and III*. So there are droids (bog standard, rolling and super) who shatter

DIE ANOTHER DAY

YOU AND I ARE GOING TO LIVE FOREVER.
LIVE FOREVER. LIVE FOREVER...

An interesting feature of *Republic Commando* is that when you get shot to pieces, the battle continues around your blaster-torn remains. You can either let your AI buddies fight on and resuscitate you when the danger is past, or demand a (regulation-breaking) reawakening should you not trust your companions to do the job right. Similarly, when your men are downed you have to balance out whether or not it's worth spending a few seconds in the line of fire to get a man back on the team.

"Do you have to keep on dying sir?"





The game is pyrotechnic, to say the least.



Your visor is gooped and dented in true Metroid Prime fashion.

as spectacularly as they do in the movies, and Geonosians who fly around with some superb laser-beam weapons and are suitably squiddy. What's more, there are Trandoshans (lizard creatures of the same species as Bossk the bounty hunter) who are ridiculously boring until they start appearing with gas-tanks strapped to their backs – at which point well-aimed shots can jet them high up into the stratosphere and they automatically become the best villains in the whole piece.

THINGS FALL APART

Negative stuff now. There just aren't enough different sorts of baddies to keep you entertained throughout, and the same goes for the environments that you fight in. The decision to have a mere three locations in the entire game certainly gives a far more 'campaign' feel to affairs, but this neither makes up for the distinct lack of story nor the

repeated corridors, situations and environments. With the inclusion of some more fan-friendly, compact missions that weren't so strongly tied to the Lucas prequel masterplan (hunting down a troublesome Krayt Dragon on Tatooine, hunting a criminal gang in the depths of Coruscant, that sort of thing), there's no doubt that this could have been a far, far more attractive title.

As I've mentioned before, the game looks and feels like an Xbox release. If you're beginning to feel hemmed in when taken away from the wide open vistas of *Far Cry* or *Tribes: Vengeance*, you certainly won't get much relief from *Republic Commando*. Despite having a fair few large rooms and never approaching *Doom 3* proportions, the game is essentially a corridor shooter with shiny knobs on. And while we're having a moan, the ability to look down your gun barrel CoD-style is ugly and unnecessary, while the

introduction of some truly appalling and constantly re-appearing head-attaching hover-droids will make you want to break things. Which isn't great when you're sitting next to one of the most pricey things you've ever bought.

INDUSTRIOUS LIGHT AND MAGIC

Republic Commando is guilty of all the crimes I've levelled against it, but there is salvation – and this salvation comes through the detail. It's in the

form of smoke, mirrors and shallow licks of fresh paint. What's boosted this game from a score in the high 70s and scraped it over the line of the 'Essential' boundary is the (sometimes inspirational) treatment of incidental features and signs of genuine TLC that's gone into the game's production. And yes, (because I know

you're thinking this), I'm aware that the demo level isn't overly special – you're just going to have to trust me on this one.

It's in things like sniping the armour away from a Super Battle Droid's chest and hammering its hidden weak-spot. It's in that same droid perhaps having its legs blasted away from it and lying on the

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

WHY, WHY OH WHY, NO CO-OP?

If ever a game were crying out for a little bit of co-operative play, then here it is. What you do get is a few (rubbish) Deathmatch levels that have been crow-barred in with Xbox Live in mind. However, what the game's crying out for, loudly and plaintively, is a feature in which you can destroy droids alongside your nearest and dearest.



Why can't your buddies play Sev, Scorch or Fixer?



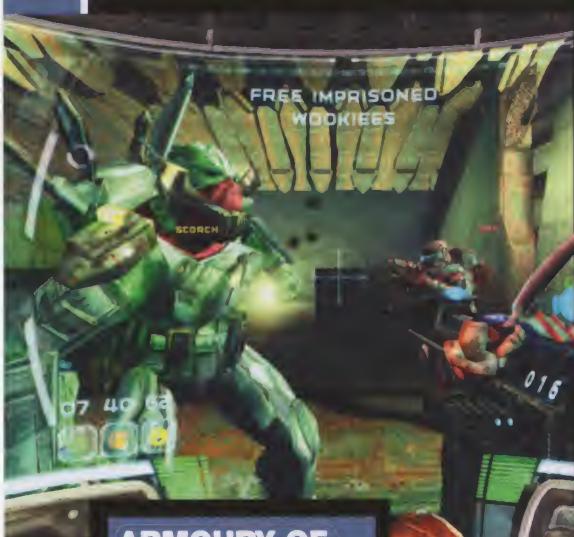
Spider droids: not as tough as they look.



The game begins in the Episode II arena.



Incidental animations and deaths are rife.



ARMOURY OF THE CLONES

BIG MEATY BOOM-STICKS FOR A LESS CIVILISED AGE

Weapons range from the blindingly good to the decidedly average. Your all-purpose blaster with snipe and explosive attachments is decent enough, although some of the enemy weapons that can be pilfered (notably the Trandoshan shotgun) simply don't feel as weighty or as powerful as you expect. That said, the Geonosian laser-beam gun is a real show-stealer. Grenades too are well utilised, with a range that expands beyond the mere thermal detonator, all the way to EMP-style electricity throwers and some powerful wave emitters that are hard not to love.



Now that's a big polo.



One of the rubbish Trandoshans. The good ones have jet-packs. True story.

floor, before pushing itself up with its last embers of life and blasting you when you least expect it. Then it's in Sev wandering over to its carcass, kicking it and telling the world in general: "This one's gone."

SMALL THINGS

There are so many incidental moments like this that, despite a fair amount of repetition, you honestly find yourself getting reeled in and subsequently carried away. It's hard to explain, but you can't help but feel that the limited horizons I've mentioned has allowed the developer to look inwards and concentrate on gameplay nuggets that would have been brushed over in most other games. Whether it's Trandoshans kicking silently-ticking thermal detonators back towards you or allies ducking underneath your line of fire. Or it might be your visor's in-built

laser windscreen wiper removing Geonosian bug goo from your monitor. Alternatively, it might be one of your men grumpily accusing you of being a sadist for ordering him away from a healing bacta terminal. Whatever it is, there's a certain quality lying dormant here that we haven't seen in a LucasArts product in aeons. The way that your squad chat between themselves is entirely refreshing as well.

Whether scripted or prompted by on-screen action, there's always a background grumble emanating from your squad. They're either berating you for giving confusing orders and for dying all the time, cracking dry jokes about the enemy and even (unless I'm giving them too much credit) one moment when they gently mock the fragilities of the game itself – one moaning something along the lines of "What? Another hangar?" and another responding, "Well, I guess

the wookiees just like hangars." Obviously, they occasionally chirrup the same glib phrases over and over, but it commits the crime so much less than *Pacific Assault* and *Half-Life 2* that it's hard to come down too heavily on it.

Last, but by no means least, is the music. I'm a philistine, I rarely notice anything apart from loud *Painkiller* rock – but dear sweet Jesus the music in *Republic Commando* is wonderful, and easily the best in any game that I've played in recent years. Choirs chant, orchestras orchestrate and familiar *Star Wars* licks pound your ears into near delirium – it really is quite fantastic.

FINAL WORDS

Republic Commando isn't rocket science: almost in the same way that opinion was split down the middle over *Attack Of The Clones*, this is designed for gamers who live in the box marked 'let's shoot

First, let's get one thing straight – this isn't another *Dark Forces*. However, LucasArts has still delivered a very solid and enjoyable squad-based FPS with a forbidding atmosphere, meaty upgradeable weapons, apocalyptic music and creepy enemies. Taking control of your clone warriors in the hectic battles is easy and satisfying, and the helmet HUD (nicked straight from the GameCube's *Metroid Prime*) works superbly. In a universe starved of decent *Star Wars* games, this is one of the better efforts, even though it does feel a little 'console-y'. It's a borderline 'Essential', but *Republic Commando* just about edges it because of the wookiees.



A droid I killed. Ha ha!

stuff' rather than 'let's sit down and think about this'. It isn't an out-and-out success either, but there is an underlying charm and sparkle that simply cannot be denied.

After so many dismal years, there's evidence that somewhere deep down in the LucasArts caverns, there's suddenly a flicker of hope for the future. A new hope, if you will. Or at least an almost-new, second-hand one that still looks slightly optimistic. Even if it is a bit grubby and has been in the wars a little. And a little bit of hope is far better than none at all.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Intuitive and streamlined squad system
- ✓ Moments of genuine charm
- ✓ Nice battle-chat and characters
- ✓ Gob-smacking music
- ✗ Repeated environments and set-pieces
- ✗ Too basic for some

80

Functional and basic, but still a blast



Super Battle Droids are genuinely menacing.

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SECOND SIGHT

■ £29.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Free Radical Design | ETA: Out Now
www.codemasters.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Jamie Sefton plays a game, has a think and writes a review. With his MIND...



Manual Reload 'SPACE'

Just pretend he's your boss. Woods, this has got your name on it...

IN PERSPECTIVE

PSI-Ops:

THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

Reviewed This Issue, Score 97%
 Check out page 74 for our verdict.
 We reckon Psi-Ops wins the battle for PC gamer's hearts, and most importantly, minds.

HALF-LIFE 2

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%
 OK, there are no psychic powers, but the gravity gun along with state-of-the-art Havok physics means you get to manipulate the environment like no other game in history.

SPOOKY.

Who could've known that two telekinetic mind-control games would arrive on PC ZONE's desk in the same issue – except perhaps someone with extra-sensory perception. Or a release schedule. In any case, Will Porter is taxing his undeveloped young mind with Psi-Ops (over the page), while I'm using what grey matter I have left after decades of alcohol abuse to play Second Sight.

Developer Free Radical Design was formed by ex-members of the illustrious Nintendo 64 *GoldenEye* team at Rare, and has been busy making the tongue-in-cheek console shooters *TimeSplitters* 1, 2 and 3 over the past few years. A great pedigree – but is the company's first PC game (actually a conversion of last year's third-

person console action-thriller) worthy of a brain drain?

GORDON'S GENE

To my considerable fanboy relief, *Second Sight* turns out to be a decent and enjoyable couple of days gaming. You play as Dr John Vattic, a geeky scientist in the mould of *Half-Life*'s Gordon Freeman, who awakes in a US medical facility, beaten-up and having no memory, but with newly-acquired psychic powers. And no – we're not talking about bending spoons here. Instead,

Vattic can pick up and throw objects and people, heal himself and perform other freaky abilities that are revealed as you progress.

Each level in the game alternates between the present and flashbacks to the past – six months previous, the non-telekinetic Dr Vattic was recruited to a top-secret military

operation to discover the whereabouts of a mysterious scientist specialising in psychic phenomena. As the plot unravels you travel to various locations around the world including Siberia and New York, meet new characters and begin to piece your shattered life back together.

I was sceptical about the two different story strands at first, but it's a useful way – especially in early levels – of breaking up the stealthier psychic sequences with the more full-on squad-based action of the special-ops missions. The different time zones are also a useful narrative device, and with the use of short-and-sweet cut-scenes, genuinely keep you impatient to discover more about the mind-bending conspiracy at hand.

ALL IN THE MIND

DR JOHN VATTIC'S PSI POWERS BLOWN APART...



HEALING

An essential psychic power that enables you to restore health quickly. Later in the game, you can also heal squad-mates.

PSI BLAST

A concentrated blast of psychic energy: target individuals or eventually, use it explosively against multiple foes.

PROJECTION

Create an astral self that can pass through laser traps and other objects, operate switches and possess people.

TELEKINESIS

The ability to move objects with only the power of the mind. Vattic develops his powers throughout the game.

CHARM

Convinces humans he's not there, making him virtually invisible. Good for stealth, this can also calm or alter friends' minds.



A ragdoll body eerily defies gravity. Broken physics in action.



As with Midway's *Psi-Ops*, the game's major selling point is the use of psi powers (shown with a rechargeable bar in the top left-hand corner of the screen) that your lead character can use to interact with the environment. This is dependant, quite obviously, on having a physics system that allows you to fling stuff about, as you can with the gravity gun in Valve's magnificent shooter. Unfortunately, *Second Sight*'s physics qualification is strictly GCSE Grade F compared with *Half-Life 2*'s first-class honours degree.

When using your powers of telekinesis, by first auto-targeting an object, then using both mouse buttons, everything appears to weigh the same – from small boxes to hulking pieces of medical technology – all bouncing around like they're made of tin. Worse still, when you want to be able to pick up enemies and slam them against walls or throw them off ledges, the bodies flap like mannequins filled with cotton wool.

Admittedly, it's cruelly entertaining when the poor fools start writhing in mid-air, holding

their throats and gasping "make it stop", but the fun is stilted because the ragdolls are so like, erm, ragdolls, and tend to crumble in extremely unrealistic (and very painful) ways.

Nasty physics glitches also happen throughout the game, that tend to break the illusion of reality, snapping you out of the action. Drinks cans vibrate and suddenly drop through tables, while enemies kick at you with ghostly legs that can pass through glass doors – strange unearthly phenomena that we reckon aren't meant to occur. However, *Second Sight* later introduces genuinely innovative psychic upgrades to aid Dr Vattic in overcoming some of the game's simple puzzles, such as bypassing a lethal laser trap (see 'All in the Mind', above).

RUFF 'EM UP

If you want to ignore any namby-pamby mind powers, *Second Sight* does offer you the opportunity of using good old-fashioned weaponry to dish out some serious 21st-century justice. Dr Vattic can use tranquiliser guns, pistols, machine guns and shotguns, along with a particularly fine sniper rifle that zooms in on an enemy for easy head shots.

Targeting with both weapons and psi powers, though, is often a frickin' nightmare in the game. An auto-target feature supposedly locks onto the nearest enemy by pressing the right mouse button, but it doesn't always happen. This means that you can be frantically trying to shoot a soldier with a machine gun, while the game is auto-aiming on a goon on the left with a slow-firing pistol.

More annoying is the fact that when using psi powers to finish off adversaries, the game locks onto any moveable object – not good when you have a marauding bunch of killer hoods to deal with and you're busy levitating a cardboard box by mistake.

The camera doesn't help either, offering a third-person view that strays into difficult viewing points, a useless static camera and a first-person mode that doesn't allow you to move...

IN THE END THOUGH...

Yet despite all these glitches, through sheer will power, *Second Sight* manages to remain entertaining fare. Free Radical Design's cartoon style has great charm, the music is superb, and its other trademark – silly humour – is evident, with one hilarious animation of an enemy shot in the groin, managing to make him look both embarrassed and in absolute agony. *Second Sight*'s great strength over *Psi-Ops* is the storyline and atmosphere, but we have to conclude that the latter's physics system and psychic powers are far superior. At least that's what the voices in my head are telling me. □



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great storyline
- ✓ Distinctive graphical style
- ✓ Entertaining psychic powers
- ✗ Dodgy physics
- ✗ Flawed aiming system
- ✗ Very much a console game

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Out-psyched

"Second Sight's great strength over Psi-Ops is the storyline and atmosphere"



Struggling torso plus large stamping machine equals fun.

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

■ £29.99 | Pub: Midway | Dev: Midway | ETA: Out Now | www.psiopsgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB and a 64MB 3D card

Will Porter plays a game, has a think and writes a review. With his MIND...

IN PERSPECTIVE

SECOND SIGHT

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 68%

Psi-Ops has a far less intriguing storyline than the Free Radical effort, but it's around five times more fun.

HALF-LIFE 2

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%

Clearly no competitor for Gordon, but once or twice showing as much physical intuition.

LENS FLARE used to be amazing. The first time I saw it, on a friend's souped-up Pentium playing *Privateer 2: The Darkening*, I spent full minutes flying towards distant stars and then turning slightly away – ogling the pretty light refracting on the screen. Now it's just another notch on an endless list of things that used to be amazing, but are now firmly in the realm of the mundane; like Pop Tarts or (according to some of my older work-mates), Cherry Coke.

Physics then, is the new lens flare. It's still new enough

to provoke a flurry of gravity guns, but in a year or two's time it'll be as everyday as a Monday or a Tuesday. Today though, despite the fact that physics are so thoroughly the spirit of the age, the number of games that have used the tools available to their full potential are few. This is why, then, that in such an age of physical saturation, a bog-standard console port can be uttered in the same breath as *Half-Life 2*, *Max Payne 2* and *Far Cry*. Y'see, *Psi-Ops* may not be that pretty and may not be from round these parts, but it nails the integration of Havok

and gameplay together as well as the rest of 'em.

FAR FROM HOME

In every single way, *Psi-Ops* screams at you that it belongs on a PS2 – it looks, sounds and feels like any number of cheap third-person *Metal Gear* knock-offs that you might care to mention. The story is rubbish (it's here that *Second Sight*, p72, gets its first of two measly holds on *Psi-Ops*) and runs thus: bad psychic men called 'The Movement' turn good, honest soldiers into more bad men, while you kill them all and

blow up everything they own. Some of the bad men are bigger than others, they're called bosses, and there's a woman or two on hand as well – in case you get bored and want to imagine doing sex. It's not rocket science.

It does, however, manage to conjure up a strange whiff of bygone coin-op beat 'em ups

Wow! Looks like *The Tomorrow People...*

"The variety of gory approaches on offer ensures *Psi-Ops* is never boring"



and mid-90s blaster-thons – nowhere better demonstrated than with its raft of eclectic bosses that include a giant *Kingpin*-esque black guy, a blind Asian man with funny hair and techno glasses and a Chinese woman who plays with your mind in ingenious ways.

So far, so nostalgic – but *Psi-Ops* comes into its own

with its vast array of psychic powers that gradually unlock as you work through the game, giving you a vast number of ways to kill people. To demonstrate, imagine a lonesome grunt in a dangerous environment and tot up exactly how many ways you could off him. First, you could lift him up with your telekinesis skills (TK)



Scanners eat your heart out...

and throw his forlorn ragdoll with a swift nudge of the mouse – off a ledge, into a wall or into some handy nearby appliance (a giant gut-shredding fan for example). Second, you could lob furniture at him – preferably items that explode on impact. Third, you could sneak up behind and give him a neat bump on the head, or raise him up into the air and suck all the mental juice out of him until his head explodes. Fourth, you could take over his mind and get him to commit suicide by shooting a nearby gas tank. Fifth, you could set fire to him with pyrokinesis. Sixth, you could go with the traditional approach and shoot him with your big gun. *Psi-Ops* is as much fun as it is sadistic – and the variety of gory approaches on offer ensures it's never boring.

LEVEL UP

Meanwhile, level design is bog-standard, occasionally straying to very good, with a fair amount of getting lost for five minutes and having to consult a confusing map screen. Patchy is the word. There are, however, some sublime moments of gameplay, specifically boss battles that are wonderfully inventive and provide the first viable 'Luke versus Vader in Empire'-style telekinesis bout I've ever seen in a game.

Elsewhere, some occasions are sheer videogame magic – such as when you find yourself sealed in a room filling with gas and have to repeatedly slam an enemy into a sheet of glass until it smashes and you can get a gulp of air. Class.

ENOUGH ALREADY...

One issue that arises in *Psi-Ops* is that there are almost too many things to do and buttons to press. For example, there's all manner of stealth stuff that becomes fairly redundant when you realise that setting people on fire is far more fun. Likewise,

BURN BABY BURN

USING ARCHITECTURE, MACHINERY AND FURNITURE FOR FUN AND MURDER

In the game, you're shown the more enjoyable aspects of some rooms through flash-forwards. The one on show here is an open furnace with one or two plebs innocently waddling around next to it. Guess what happens next? Similar situations arise with giant rolling stone balls and large crushing machines...



there's a button you can tap to hug walls and duck around corners that I forgot I even had until I accidentally pressed it while attempting to throw boulders at passing evil mechanics.

In terms of controls, the port isn't too sloppy. For instance, when you chuck someone through the air, the game assumes you want them to hit something painful and plays with your launch angle, so mouse control never needs to be all that precise. Plus, camera angles are never the bugbear that they are in the far inferior *Second Sight*. The most obvious clunker here though, is that little effort has been made to tart up the graphics – so *Psi-Ops* ends up looking pretty dated. Also, console menu screens remain abundant, as they have in games of this ilk since the times of cavemen.

Fun as it is, there's no doubt that this is a graphically-dated game better enjoyed when sitting on a sofa – and as such is hard to recommend for the

PC. It remains, however, the best console port since *The Suffering* and an enjoyable experience, if a little reminiscent of macho games of yore.

If all goes well, we'll all be laughing at *Psi-Ops* in a year, by then bathed with games that have pushed physics so far into gameplay that they've become at one with the Cherry Cokes, lens flares and Pop Tarts of this world. Until then though, we'll treat it as a dirty, guilty pleasure – and a good one at that. □

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent meld of physics and gameplay
- ✓ Many and varied abilities
- ✓ Heads that explode
- ✓ Great bosses, intriguing puzzles
- ✗ Not at home on PC
- ✗ Dated graphics

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Our little secret...



A man and his shed. Has there ever been a more noble relationship?

THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Blue Byte | ETA: February 18 | www.thesettlers.com

REQUIRES PIII 1.0GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRABLES** P4 2.8GHz, 512MB and a 128MB 3D card

It takes a special kind of man to resist a German resource management game. Paul Presley is a special kind of man

OK, WE might as well get right into it. My problem with *Settlers* isn't so much what it is – it's more about what it isn't. What it is is a reasonably competent, solidly efficient resource-management game with vague pretensions at being a strategy game. What it isn't is particularly worthy of note in any area it attempts to engage in. Let me explain...

Heritage Of Kings is actually the fifth *Settlers* title in a series that stretches right back to 1993. Right from the start, the games were focused on the lives and times of communities of wee little fellas chopping wood, mining pits and building farms until they've amassed enough strength to have a ruck with their neighbours and take over the place. So far, so *Age Of Empires*,

except that *The Settlers* pre-dated Microsoft's standard-setting series.

This time round, the *Settlers* have supposedly grown up and thrown off the shackles of their cartoonish past. So now you have a 'proper' plot about fantasy medieval heroes taking on an evil enemy, you have whizzy 3D graphics, and

IN PERSPECTIVE

RISE OF NATIONS

Reviewed issue 129, Score 90%
Resource management strategy done right. Epic in scope, packed with class and style, and it just plays so damned well. Makes *Settlers* look like amateur hour.

KNIGHTS OF HONOR

Reviewed issue 148, Score 66%
Better than *Settlers*, but not by much. KOH at least tries some innovation in gameplay terms, with diplomacy and espionage.





It was no good. They just couldn't get the conga line started.

you have all the resources you could ever hope to manage in one game. Problem is, none of it is any good.

THE OTHERS

If you want big old historical battles with hundreds of troops, then you need more than a few variations in unit types and basic formation commands. You need *Rome: Total War* (or *Medieval: Total War* or *Shogun: Total War*) or, if you prefer a slightly more fantastical approach, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-earth*. There you'll get all your massive armies from the outset and will have

far more in terms of strategic and tactical warfare to play with.

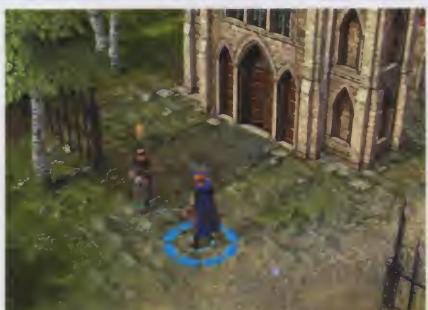
On the flipside, if what you're after is resource management gaming of the highest calibre, you're not really getting anything here that you haven't already encountered (better) in the *Age Of Empires* series, *Rise Of Nations*, *Civilization* and so on. *Settlers* has a couple of nice ideas, but you need more than that to warrant real attention in a day and age when games are routinely breaking new barriers at every turn.

Take the citizen moral function, for instance (you know the one – a happy

WHAT A MAN'S GOTTA DO

MISSIONS PROVIDE STRUCTURE, IF NOT INTEREST, TO EACH LEVEL

Unlike *Age Of Empires* (for instance), *Settlers: HOK* provides you with a focused sense of direction on each level. Although primarily each map is bested by simply building the best settlement you can (and it's not as though there's ever much variety to be found in this function), until you create a strong enough army to see off whatever foe is currently pitted against you, these maps are broken down into sub-quests such as making deals with neighbouring towns for support or rescuing kidnapped citizens.



Go here, do that, kill them. It never ends.

worker is a productive worker). Buy *Theme Park* or *Rollercoaster Tycoon* or any one of a hundred *Sim City*-type games and you'll find all the mood management gaming you could hope for. True, you can argue that at least *Settlers* gives you a bit of all these aspects in the one package but be honest... If you pour the dregs of a dozen different pint glasses into one drink, you're not going to end up with a pint of ice cold Carlsberg.

I've followed the *Settlers* series since the child-friendly cartoon antics of the early '90s. Back then it took the basic resource management concept and ploughed its own furrow – centring on the dynamic relationship between a worker and his needs rather than purely his function. Combined with a quirky sense of humour (attacks would be initiated with a polite introduction and a friendly bout of fisticuffs), it was a winner.

Problem is, it never really changed as the years progressed (except to lose the humour) and other games, most notably the *Age Of Empires* series, quickly took up the ball and ran so far with it that *Settlers* would need the Hubble telescope to even see the dust they've been throwing up as they go. Now these games all do the same things that *Settlers* is boasting about, but they do them better and with more



Early toilets were a plumber's nightmare.



Robin Hood, Robin Hood, marching through the glen...



"Right, where's the dodgy pirate games stall?"



"Christ, the Grand National's getting harder."



"Hmm, a lady. Better get my sideburns waxed."



The blanmange mining wasn't going well.



Don't fancy your chances mate...

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

MEET THE GANG 'COS THE BOYS ARE HERE...

The 'Hero' side of the game is central to *Settlers*' story. Initially it's the tale of a young man avenging his mother's death, but before long it turns into the standard fantasy fare of toppling a dark menace to the safety of the lands.

Along the way you recruit a band of travelling heroes – the magician, the warrior, the thief, the priest and so on, all with special abilities that set them above the average Settler. Young Dario has a pet hawk, for instance that can scout out terrain for you, while Salim can heal units and set man-traps.

In single-player you get to control each of these as the story progresses, eventually controlling the entire fellowship in the final battle against the evil Mordred (I love originality). In multiplayer games meanwhile, each player can opt to control one hero in games of conquest, technology races or straight point games.



A motley crew, yesterday.

appeal for the casual gamer – which I'm led to understand is where Blue Byte was hoping to pitch this title following the nightmare of micro-management that was *Settlers IV*.

Well, harsh truth maybe, but it hasn't achieved its goal. *Settlers: Heritage Of Kings* is just as fiddly and irritating to control as the previous one and, if anything, the new graphical style (more grown-up, less *Lemmings*-like) actually serves to remove the one

distinction that might have brought outsiders in to the genre. Visually *Settlers: HOK* resembles any one of a hundred RTS titles that arrive from central Europe every month. It's lost all its character and comes off

feeling very bland, tiresome, derivative and unappealing.

KNIGHTS RIDER

Again, viewed from a purely objective basis, as if *Settlers: HOK* existed in a scientific bubble free from the influence of the wider world, there's nothing



SECOND OPINION

SUZY WALLACE

With a lot of recent RTS games foregoing the traditional resource harvesting and taking more of a tactical warfare route, *Settlers* is a return to old-skool values. Although I wholeheartedly agree with Prez that it doesn't particularly offer anything new to the genre, what it does bring to the table is some solid RTS gameplay, one of the most extensive tech trees I've ever had the opportunity to make my villagers research, a sublime graphics engine and some lovingly detailed animation. Ground-breaking it may not be, but if you haven't yet grown tired of the old harvest, build, and attack formula, *Settlers* has ended up like most German exports: efficient and well built, but in the end, perhaps just a little bit too German.

wrong with it. It doesn't cause you to throw hammers at your keyboard in frustration at the controls. It doesn't swear to you that it can be played offline only to insist two months later that you have to have an Internet connection running at all times. It doesn't infect your hard drive with a killer virus that eats all your documents and replaces your desktop with undeletable pictures of a penetrated sheep's anus. It's completely inoffensive. And as a result it's of no interest whatsoever.

There's a fall-back joke that often gets used in situations like this. *Settlers* may be big in Germany, it goes, but so is the music of David Hasselhoff. The problem with that joke is that Hasselhoff's music actually warrants interest due to a certain kitsch appeal for the insipidly awful. *Settlers* is far from awful, it's just mind-numbingly dull. Which is far, far worse. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Doesn't crash
- ✗ Tired
- ✗ Visually uninspiring
- ✗ Lacks any variety in gameplay
- ✗ Terrible combat
- ✗ Unoriginal story

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Unrewarding



What Big Ron would call a crowd scene. If he was allowed on TV.



A hint of offside there.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2004-2005

£29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now | www.uefachampionsleaguegame.ea.com

REQUIRES PIII 700 MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRSES** P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill reviews another football game in his sleep



Select a corner and hope for the best.



The obligatory behind-the-net replay.



Keepers make freak saves.

IN PERSPECTIVE

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Reviewed issue 149, Score 89

Don't panic, this still remains the definitive arcade football game.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2005

Reviewed issue 147, Score 60

Another year, another FIFA Football, another disappointment, another number one.

YOU HAVE to admire EA's relentless pursuit of the consumer dollar. Less than four months after the release of *FIFA 2005*, they're at it again with yet another spot-the-difference football title. Coming in a fallow year for international tournaments, somebody must have panicked and swiftly snapped up the Champions League licence. Assuming the game reappears next year, sandwiched between the inevitable *FIFA Football 2006* and *World Cup 2006*, that'll be three games in just over half a year. Respect.

Back to today's game though, it has apparently been developed by a new team at EA Canada (albeit still produced by Bill '12 Players' Harrison).

FIFA in Champions League clothing, you'd naturally assume, and you'd be partly right. However, despite the superficial similarities, the gameplay has been tightened up considerably. Whisper it softly, this is actually a highly playable affair.

How so? For starters, the tackling has been sorted out, forcing you to make the choice between a risky slide or a less effective bout of jockeying. The

free kicks have been measurably improved, enabling you to decide whether to shoot or pass. As for the corners, they needed to be drastically improved to be mediocre. They have been, and they are, although in their favour you can now select the type of cross away from the prying eyes of your opponent.

BUTTON MOON

Shooting is initially difficult, with anything from long-range generally flying high and wide. In time though, it becomes

manageable, and you actually have to work at it rather than simply pressing a button. The general play is a major improvement, requiring you to work openings, exploit players' individual skills, and effectively play football. Of course, all this comes with the correct names, stadiums and a staggeringly realistic (if eventually repetitive) commentary by Clive Tyldesley and Andy Gray.

Naturally the game modes include the Champions League, enabling you to bend the rules by entering with one of some 240 teams. The competition can also

be played out online, something we could almost imagine doing, logistics permitting.

However, arguably of more interest is the bizarre season mode that claims to make *UEFA* the first mission-based football game. Effectively putting you at the whim of a megalomaniac new club owner, he doesn't so much meddle in team affairs as give you highly specific orders – such as the number of minutes a certain player should be on the pitch. We were even commanded to immediately sell three first team players following a 0-0 practice match against the reserves; a slight over-reaction, you might think. It's a mildly compelling novelty, but ultimately it's on the pitch that *UEFA* wins. Punctuation fans will be pleased to learn that while it's not amazingly good, it is, amazingly, good. **FM**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Tighter gameplay
- ✓ Improved set pieces
- ✓ Interesting career mode
- ✓ Piss-take radio phone-in
- ✗ Needs a PS2 pad
- ✗ Inherently unsuited to PC
- ✗ About three weeks since *FIFA Football 2005*

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Surprisingly, we don't hate it



Heroes always come in handy.



New enemy creatures are handy.



We don't know about you, but we'd have seen a doctor before herpes level 28...

SPELLFORCE: SHADOW OF THE PHOENIX

FULL VERSION OF SPELLFORCE:
ORDER OF DAWN REQUIRED

£19.99 | Pub: JoWooD | Dev: Phenomic | ETA: Feb 18 | www.spellforce.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB and a 3D card DESIRES P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and an Internet connection

SpellForce turns up the heat as add-on number two arrives in time for spring. Richie Shoemaker breaks out the factor 15...

BARELY A year has passed since the original game breezed across our monitors and we're already up to this, the second expansion pack, allegedly the final episode in the SpellForce saga. As seasonally mistimed as the last (which introduced a wintry world of ice and frosty goblins when we were enjoying a temperate Euro 2004), *Shadow Of The Phoenix* takes us from the depths of a British winter into the desert lands of

Empyria, hot on the heels of your old mucker Darius (famous for his appearance on 'Wizard Idol').

Unlike the *Breath Of Winter* add-on, which was a kind of gigantic side-quest away from the original game, *Phoenix* picks up the story with you putting your feet up after a long and arduous campaign, only to find that greater dangers await you in the form of a Shadow Sword and an evil necromancer. It's typical sequel-driven fantasy fare basically, which in the vein of the series so far features a plot bursting with cliché and dialogue that would have even old Tolksy spinning in his grave.

SAME AS IT EVER WAS
The phrase 'more of the same' could not be more apt, for it's difficult to find any evidence of anything being improved: the graphics, though colourful and vibrant, lack definition close up, maps are as linear as ever and although there are plenty of new monsters and enemy characters to take on, they still react only when you appear within a certain sphere, and their strategy is simply to make a beeline and

starting hitting. Not that *Phoenix* is entirely desolate; the campaign has more than 40 hours of single-player gameplay, with a smattering of new multiplayer maps and an improved co-operative mode. Of course, characters can be imported from the first adventures and you can now reach level 50. It goes without saying there are new hero characters and dozens of spells to make use of.

THE HOURS PASS

However, oodles of new content does not a great expansion make (stick that in your book of quotations). If you've already invested 60-80 hours in the first two adventures, it would be churlish to dissuade you from completing the trilogy. In fact, in spite of the done-to-death plot



Each race boasts two new buildings: a gym is not one of them.

IN PERSPECTIVE

SPELLFORCE: THE ORDER OF DAWN

Reviewed #137, Score 79%

The original role-playing strategy game is still worth a look for any fantasy gaming fan. It's surprisingly varied and simple to master – and you can probably find it at a knockdown price.

SPELLFORCE: THE BREATH OF WINTER

Reviewed #145, Score 76%

The first add-on offered a wintry theme that may be more suited to the season, but the story was an offshoot rather a continuation so it's hardly an essential purchase. Neither is it necessary for *Shadow Of The Phoenix* to work.

and naff characters, the underlying gameplay remains fresh and invigorating, moving effortlessly from arcade role-playing and exploration to epic real-time strategy – almost as if *Diablo* and *Warcraft* had been fused together. If such a hybrid appeals, you'd do well to seek out the original game and come to this at a later date. *SpellForce* dogmatists of course will have much to enjoy, but if you found your interest waning through previous episodes, it's very unlikely you'll find anything here to get you back in the mood.



The evil Lich King is defeated.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Remains uniquely charming
- ✓ Loads of new skills/spells/characters and more
- ✓ Big 40-hour campaign
- ✗ The tired story goes on and on
- ✗ Terrible script
- ✗ Simplistic AI unchanged

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Fatigue is setting in



A river runs through it. Egypt, that is.



The game uses a modified Empire Earth 3D engine.



"Nice monkey."

IMMORTAL CITIES: CHILDREN OF THE NILE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Sega | Dev: Tilted Mill | ETA: Out Now | www.immortalcities.com

REQUIRES 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX9.0c-compatible 3D card **DESIRSES** 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX9.0c-compatible 3D card

Richie Shoemaker is in denial. De-Nile? Oh forget it...

AS CLAIMED in the introduction to the game's manual, *Children Of The Nile* is 'unlike any city-building game that you might have played before'. This rather bold assumption is based on the developer's design decision to force you to focus your attention on your citizens rather than your buildings. Or, to be more precise, your aim is to fulfil each citizen's basic need for food, health, security and sandals by planning a city and leaving them to their own devices (rather than by ordering them off to find fruit). Here, so the theory goes, if you build the right building in the right place at the right time, success is assured.

Of course, it isn't as easy as all that. For a start, there are over a dozen different resources to

gather, many more items that have to be built or imported in order to keep the people happy, along with a complex social web of careers and standings that your people will naturally migrate through. Add to the mix the bewildering number of Egyptian deities that must be worshipped (often by different people at different times of the year), and you have some idea just how tricky getting the balance right can be. And that's before you've factored in the attentions of traders and raiders from outside the city walls.

FIRE IN CAIRO

Typically, a game begins by setting out farms along the riverbank. Close to those should be your craftsmen and shops, while nearby are the

nobility, more exclusive stores and service buildings like hospitals, temples and schools. If people have enough food, they start wanting shiny things – however, the richer your society becomes, the higher the danger that you might start ignoring the needs of the lower classes.

Unless you look after your labourers and their overseers, your city-state could descend into anarchy – and that elaborate pointy tomb you've been planning isn't going to get built. No pyramid, no immortality. Expand too quickly and the social ladder becomes top heavy; advance too slowly and you die before your crypt is complete. Certainly, more than any other game of its kind, knowing when to build is just as important as what and where.

Of course, when you do get the balance right and all are happy, the gods shining and the granaries full to bursting, watching the people at work has a real sedate charm. Even when things do go wrong, the game is happy to let you take your time. At least, that's what it feels like. The fact is, because you don't have to micro-manage each individual, you can concentrate on policies and problems, not arbitrary game mechanics.

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Not that the mechanics are faultless. Juggling the spiritual needs of the population can be a real headache, because despite the excellent interface, finding out who worships which god requires you to click on each individual house, which soon



becomes a mammoth chore. Combat is a disappointing affair too, where you have to click an icon to send an army to war, then wait to hear the result – not the sort of game you'd recommend to an *Age Of Empires* fanatic then.

However, if you're in the mood for some easy-to-learn but hard-to-master city-building gameplay, *Children Of The Nile* is as good a game as you're likely to find. Hardly as unique as is claimed, but good all the same. **PM**

IN PERSPECTIVE

PHARAOH

Reviewed Issue 84, Score 84%

Pharaoh has aged considerably, however it still offers hours of compulsive entertainment – unsurprising, since many of Tilted Mill's team worked on it.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 93%

Quite simple this: if you'd rather destroy than build-up ancient civilisations, go for *Rome*.



A pyramid takes at least 50 years to build.



Even the women and children have jobs to do.

PCZONE VERDICT

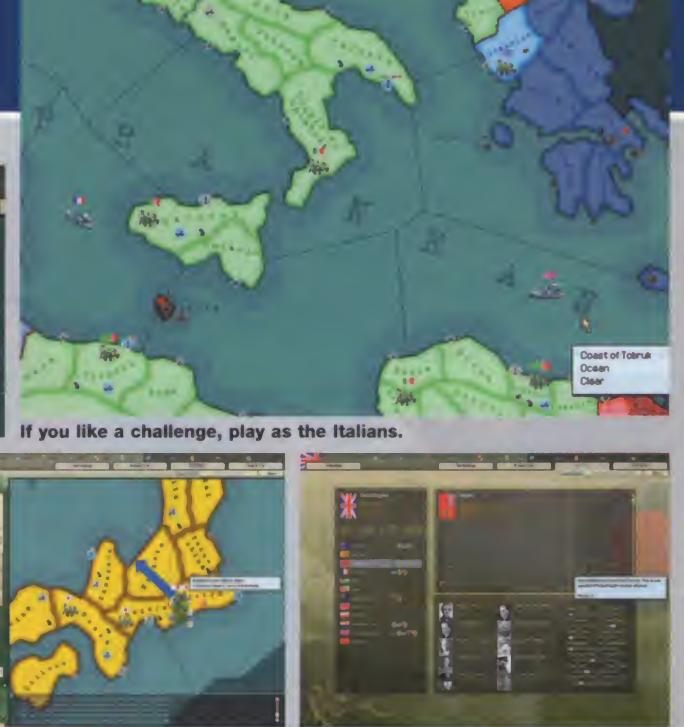
- ✓ Lots of hidden detail
- ✓ Takes weeks to exhaust
- ✓ Nice leisurely pace...
- ✗ ...Too leisurely for some
- ✗ 3D graphics lack detail
- ✗ War-mongering is too simplistic

77

Pharaoh 3D



"Actually, let's not attack Pearl Harbour. They'll only make a film of it."



If you like a challenge, play as the Italians.



The birthplace of *Battle Of The Planets!*



The Diplomacy screen: no sign of Dubya.

HEARTS OF IRON II

■ £29.99 | Pub: Koch Media | Dev: Paradox | ETA: Out Now | www.heartsofiron2.com

REQUIRES 450MHz processor, 128MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card. **DESIRABLES** 800MHz processor, 512MB RAM, 8MB 3D card and an Internet connection

Richie Shoemaker used to like a bit of hardcore from time to time. Now we can't get him off it



WHEN A game comes with a 96-page instruction booklet, you know you're getting something with some degree of depth. The manual for *Hearts Of Iron II* is such a size, but even when you've waded through this tome, the author actually stresses that his guide is a mere introduction, rather than an exhaustive point of referral. This

should give you a good idea of what's in store should you choose to purchase what is probably the best global-level strategy game ever devised.

In essence, *Hearts Of Iron II* is to WWII gaming what *Championship Manager* is to soccer, in that it's as much about lengthy preparation and intricate resource management as it is to taking to the field and hacking down your opponent. Moreover, much of the excitement is played out in your head rather than before your eyes, for although the on-screen graphics do an excellent job of portraying a strategist's-eye view of global conflict, they are designed to

be functional rather than attractive. Underneath what would in any other strategy game be laughable sprites and crude explosions, is a level of strategy that is as broad as it is deep, all of it layered in such a way as to be accessible in order to carry out whatever strategy you wish to follow.

IN AT THE DEEP END

The good news for those who might have dived into the original game too early (see 'Going For Platinum', right), is that *HOI2* doesn't gleefully chuck you in at the deep end only to scarper and leave you spluttering in the water. Instead, it lowers you in gently (there is no shallow end), makes sure you're all right and



Foresight has helped, but the Poles are holding out against the Nazi war machine.

only then, when you're confident enough to push out, will it leave you to get on with the messy business of subjugating (or freeing) the swimming pool – or rather, the world.

The tutorial missions do a fine if unspectacular job of showing off the tools with which you must manage your economic, military and political resources. From these it is generally a good idea to try out some of the less daunting single-player missions, which apart from including all the

big to-dos like D-Day, Battles Bulge, Coral Sea and Barbarossa, also offer up a number of curious 'what if?' scenarios. (For example, a war between Brazil and Argentina and a joint Soviet/US invasion of mainland Japan.) Small in scale these may be compared to the grand 11-year campaign (set between 1936 to 1947), but the challenge is no less enticing – especially if you want to complete a game in days rather than months.

As whoever and whenever you begin the game, your country will start woefully unprepared for any kind of conflict, let alone one soon to engulf the globe. Research must be undertaken, production started, infrastructure expanded, diplomacy and trade entered into and all of it completed on time and under budget. A process easier said than done, although compared to the original game it is a process far simpler to understand than it once was.

IN PERSPECTIVE

AXIS & ALLIES

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 41%
If *Hearts Of Iron* is global real-time strategy done right, *Axis & Allies* is very wrong indeed. Playing the board game on your own would be more fun.

COMBAT MISSION: AFRIKA KORPS

Reviewed Issue 140, Score 75%
Another game commonly referred to as hardcore, this one set at the squad level with 3D graphics and acres of desert sand to get lost in.



The Cold War starts here.

In the first *Hearts Of Iron*, researching all the various technologies in order to produce a particular strain of tank was a hideous, confusing and off-putting side to the game – as was the procedure of setting up sea trade routes and convoys. Now such aspects are much simpler, yet the game's new ease of use does not come with a dumbed-down price. Convoys are now automated, although

you can fiddle with the settings if you wish. Additionally, rather than using arbitrary research points, *HOI2* requires you to employ specialist companies and individuals (General Motors and Boeing in the US, Krupp and Messerschmitt in Germany) to complete the necessary research into bigger engines and more effective offensive theories.

Despite your very best diplomatic efforts and whether

you are prepared for it or not, war, like Christmas, does eventually arrive. Whilst there are no *Rome: Total War*-style 3D battles to direct, there is just as much drama and tension in watching armies advance and retreat across the map as provinces are overrun by tanks and infantry, bombed and strafed by aircraft or pummelled by off-shore fleets of battleships



GOING FOR PLATINUM



The Technology Research screen is simpler than it looks.

HEARTS OF IRON SALUTES THE FANS

The comparisons with *Championship/Football Manager* don't end with the fact that both they and *HOI* are played from the sidelines. The fact is that almost as much as Sports Interactive depends on a network of fans who collate and discuss stats for players across the globe, Paradox has fostered a community of people happy to contribute opinions and code updates, many of whom are expert military historians. It is as a result of them that late last year the original *Hearts Of Iron* was re-released as a Platinum edition (some would argue, a playable edition), featuring all manner of mods and updates that buffed what was a rough gem into a glittering diamond. Of course, *HOI2* is the shiniest in the series to date, although its destiny only partly shadows that of *CM/FM*, the best is yet to come.

– all happening in your imagination, of course.

SIMPLE BUT SMART

Whilst the combat system may appear to ape the simplicity of a board game, the reality is much more complex. A small force of well-researched troops (better drilled with new equipment) is likely to rout a larger foe still revelling in First World War-era tactics or weaponry. It also pays to have the right general in charge of your divisions and having them attack from territories where the terrain is advantageous, the weather agreeable and at the time conducive to military operations.

The mechanics of combat have been completely overhauled since the first game. Squadrons and fleets can be set to patrol or bombard for lengthy

campaigns, and where armies would collide en masse, now you can assign supporting roles to divisions that happen to be close to the front line.

Of course, for many it will matter not one jot how accessible *Hearts Of Iron II* is. The fact is that it is an unapologetically slow and complex 2D war game that will likely have traditional RTS fans scratching their mono-brows and picking weevils out of their bearskin loincloths in bafflement. For the more 'serious' armchair general however, *Hearts Of Iron II* is the pinnacle of high-level strategy, where its interface, AI and global playing field combine to provide a game that will very likely become the benchmark for years to come. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ World War II in its entirety
- ✓ Months of gameplay, if not years
- ✓ A massive improvement on the original game
- ✓ The most approachable 'hardcore' RTS in years...
- ✗ ...But still too hardcore for some
- ✗ Simple graphics

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Axis & Allies
pour homme

MIAMI VICE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Davilex | Dev: Atomic Planet | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1.0GHz, 512MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

The '80s are back and Paul Presley wishes they weren't



Time to ruche those sleeves.



She thinks she looks good.



Ah, the '80s. The horror!

SIR EDWARD

Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. The *Godfather* trilogy. Chocolate. *The West Wing*. The United Nations. *Living In America* by James Brown. The reading room in the British Museum. Landing on the moon. The car seat belt. The Olympic torch. The Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. The singing of *La Marseillaise* in Casablanca. Penicillin. *Deus Ex*. The Great Pyramid of Giza. The printing press. *Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd. Raspberry ripple ice cream. Buddhism. Peter Jackson's *The Lord Of The Rings* special edition DVD box-set. Muhammad Ali's comeback against George Foreman in the Rumble In The Jungle. The Vatican gardens. The combustion engine. Gingerbread lattes from Starbucks. *The Phantom Of The Opera* (musical, not film). White russians. The third movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. *Final Fantasy VII*. The Voyager



Third-person action has never been so dull.

probe. *À La Recherche Du Temps Perdu*. Spaced. UNICEF. "No Mr Bond. I expect you to die!" Venice. PC ZONE. An ultrasound scan that lets you see your unborn child toss and turn in real-time. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Michelangelo's David.

Yes, when the balance sheets of life come to be tallied and eternity passes final judgement upon mankind, we can hold our

heads aloft and claim to have made some breathtaking works of wonder, awe and importance, and performed deeds of such magnificence as to shake the very foundations of heaven itself. *Miami Vice* the game is unequivocally not one of them.

PCZONE VERDICT

13

Criminal

THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: House Of Tales | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 450MHz, 64MB RAM & a 32MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM & a 64MB 3D card

Whatever happened to all the great adventure games?

Rhianna Pratchett is buggered if she knows...

I MUST admit, I had quite highish hopes for *The Moment Of Silence*: a proper adventure game not riding on the coat-tails of *Myst*, promising highfalutin concepts such as characters and an actual story – great, right?

Sadly, no. Yes, there are characters and a futuristic storyline revolving around one Peter Wright, a communications expert working on a notorious Freedom of Speech program. Some of them aren't bad either – like Bob, the guy who runs the

local kiosk who appears to know everything from the results of the latest baseball game to the political machinations of the government elite.

The problem is, there seems to be large chunks of dialogue



It's like *Hackers*, but without skateboards or talent.

present to fill up space rather than being of any use or interest. This results in some very wooden, uninspiring vocal performances. For a game with a name like this, it doesn't seem to know when to shut up.

Strangely, the graphics

range from being not at all bad in the cut-scenes to being strangely unfinished in the actual game. There's one particularly surreal moment when a chain-smoking prostitute moves her mouth and her fag stays suspended in mid-air, like some kind of bizarre party trick.

The story itself is quite interesting (albeit stolen from several movies and TV series), and it's far more pleasurable to deal with more logical puzzles rather than arsing about with levers and knobs. There are a few good moments here and there, but sadly, there's an unfinished aura to this game that permeates throughout.



In the future, everyone drinks JD.



Bob, knower of all.

PCZONE VERDICT

53

Silence isn't golden

ZOO TYCOON 2

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Blue Fang | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 733MHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card (DirectX 9.0c-compatible)

DESires P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card (DirectX 9.0c-compatible)

Wanna be a rich zoo-maker? Then ask Richie Shoemaker

SO WHAT'S changed with this latest version of the get-rich-quick with exotic animals sim? Well, it's now fully 3D, and you enter a first-person 'guest' view in order to shovel shit rather than employ some digital dole-muncher to do it. Apart from that though, Zoo Tycoon 2 is the same 'ethically'



We're guessing they have their mother's hair.



The polar bears and tigers are hitting it off.

questionable' game we reviewed a few years ago.

It's a Tycoon game, of course, only instead of roller coasters to build there are animals to fence off, and the aim is to bind them in such a way as to be aesthetically appealing to the general public and thus earn cash with which to increase your stock of endangered

species, ad infinitum.

Now, I don't have a problem with the theme – it's the gameplay I find distasteful. The experience is rather mundane and not very rewarding, unless you're destined for a secondary education and have a vague interest in zoology.

A campaign game is there if you prefer a more financial challenge, but if you just want to play about or explore the



Treat the animals right and you can send them back to the wild.

husbandry side of things, you can play with the freeform mode and its unlimited stack of cash.

On the plus-side, the 3D graphics add some much needed pizzazz to the proceedings. However, they're still not exactly bleeding-edge and with hundreds of animals pacing about, the game does slow to a crawl on all but the most powerful systems.

But the real problem comes if you're the type who likes to mix it up a bit – by housing penguins with polar bears, for instance. Artificial animal behaviour is less than satisfying, with hunter and



hunted co-existing in harmony quite unnaturally. In short then, while the Tycoon aspects work well enough, the developer has failed again to capitalise on the need for gamers to explore the sadistic side of their nature.

PCZONE VERDICT

55

Monkey business

ALEXANDER: THE HEROES HOUR

■ £19.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Meridian 93 | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX9.0-compatible 3D card
DESires P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX9.0-compatible 3D card

**Had enough of the Greek general yet?
Richie Shoemaker definitely has**

ALEXANDER The Great is one of history's most revered military commanders, and by the time of his early death he'd conquered most of the known world, a vast empire that stretched from the Balkans to the Himalayas. He was a Cavalry commander, a king, an emperor and possibly a bit gay. He was not, as this game suggests, the head of a Greek special operations unit.

Contrary to what you might expect, *Alexander: The Heroes Hour* (sic) doesn't allow you to play as the great Macedonian leader. Instead, you simultaneously control three of his 'best friends', Bileki, Ekhedem and Megacles, who together use their dubious skills (as archer, swordsman and barbarian, respectively) to smite

Alexander's foes as he carves himself an empire.

Taking aside the setting, which has obviously been quickly erected to elicit as much money as possible on the back of a certain Hollywood blockbuster, the game is possibly one of the worst examples of action role-playing I've ever played.

For a start, you can't create any characters – you start with what you're given and that's that. And yes, the experience points and dropped loot comes thick and fast, but so do the (not terribly bright) enemy soldiers: in places, these are spawned in such vast numbers that it's simply impossible to play the game.

The rest of the package is just as comedic; the manual is badly written, as is the in-game



Oh, the slaughter, the carnage.



Local Greek soldiers can be helpful chaps.



Nice levelling-up effect...

PCZONE VERDICT

12

Not Great

SENTINEL: DESCENDANTS IN TIME

■ £19.99 | Pub: DreamCatcher | Dev: Detalion/The Adventure Company | ETA: February 11

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256 MB and a 128 MB 3D card

Anthony Holden is ages beyond *Myst* and wants to come home



LORD help us, it's a real-time adventure game from the makers of *Schizm II*. You know what that means, don't you? It's another humourless trudge through the Tombs of Fantastic Boredom to find the Crystal of

Random Nonsense. Along the way, you'll visit a series of strange fantasy worlds (ooh, giant plants!) and solve puzzles so devilish you'll wish you'd brought an exorcist.

The plot of *Sentinel* doesn't bear repeating, but suffice it to say you've been strong-armed into exploring an ancient cavern left by a mysterious yet highly advanced civilisation (yes, one of those). The tomb is guarded by an enigmatic holographic sentinel (cunningly disguised as a lissom temptress in a cocktail frock), who presents you with a series of random puzzles that have absolutely no bearing on the plot.

Puzzles tend to be a mixed bag. Some are tediously simple, others ridiculously obscure and long-winded. Many require you to recognise subtle clues in the



Thankfully, all the environments are navigable in first-person 3D.

environment, such as audio cues or colour patterns, which are easily missed, especially if (like me) you've tired of the wibbly ambient soundtrack and discarded your headphones.

Outside of the puzzles, the game mostly consists of tiresome conversations with the sentinel, who seems intent upon boring you to death with undergraduate dribble about the

nature of reality. It's like *The Matrix* all over again.

As these things go it's not too bad, but it's still just another *Myst* clone that will appeal only to smug beard-wearers with too much time on their hands.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

47

Po-faced



Find the pattern or you're in a world of hurt.

THE INCREDIBLES

■ £34.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Heavy Iron Studios | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Jamie Sefton goes from zero to superhero

PIXAR'S latest smash hit feature film *The Incredibles* is a beautifully crafted slice of superhero adventure with a dark sense of humour and, well, incredible CG animation. Heavy Iron's inevitable movie-to-game conversion is a decent stab at capturing the spirit of the movie, but is strictly by-the-numbers gaming fare

with little to engage PC owners who don't rely on pocket money or mum winning at bingo to fund purchases.

The Incredibles is a third-person action game set in new locations not featured in the film, across 18 colourful levels ranging from cityscapes to tropical islands. Each member of the Incredible family has the basic range of punches, jumps



Is it a bird? Is it a plane?

and dashes, but also unique special moves, such as Mr. Incredible's gravity-defying Incredil-Jump and the young Violet Parr's invisibility. The moves are simple to pick up and within minutes you'll be throwing enemies around by their heels, pulling off impressive punch/kick combos and



Comic-book stylee.

smashing up the mostly destructible environment.

However, gameplay is soon stretched as thin as Mrs. Incredible's arms after you've tired of the new character moves and primary school-level puzzles, that include untaxing challenges such as overcoming laser traps by destroying conveniently placed power supplies. *The Incredibles* is a polished movie tie-in certainly, with quality cut-scenes, snazzy 1960s spy music and voice acting from the likes of Samuel L. Jackson (without his trademark mother***ing language), however this is strictly for the kids. If you want your heroes super, we recommend more mature gamers should plump for the excellent MMORPG *City Of Heroes* instead.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

59

Child's play



Mr. Incredible lays into the French.

COPS 2170: THE POWER OF LAW

■ £19.99 | Pub: DreamCatcher | Dev: Mist Land | ETA: February

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESires P4 2GHz, 512 MB RAM and a 128 MB 3D card

The future of reality TV revealed! Anthony Holden tunes in...



PUT SIMPLY,

Cops 2170 is one of the most unwelcoming games I've ever played. The first hour of the game is – absurdly – the worst, dropping you into a shabby-looking isometric environment



It looks like Deus Ex. But it's not.

with absolutely no signposting, assistance or indication as to what to do (let alone how or why). It simply assumes that you've played X-COM from birth, understand concepts such as Action Points and Encumbrance implicitly and enjoy nothing better than bumbling aimlessly around a tired cyberpunk world full of NPCs with dodgy AI and dodgier voice-acting.



Cops 2170 is police brutality.



You can hack police robots and take them over.

Eventually, things do start to click. Once you've got your head around the horribly-designed HUD, dire presentation and inelegant interface, you realise there's a game underneath. The broad template is X-COM, but a thin RPG layer accompanies the turn-based action, enabling you to level up your attributes as you earn experience.

You play the game as Kati, a wide-eyed police sergeant about to realise the true horror, filth and corruption of her *Deus Ex*-inspired world. Right from the first mission, your actions can lead you down a number of branching plot-lines. To help out, up to seven squad-mates

can join you along the way, including an extremely annoying genetically-enhanced rat.

Like *Jagged Alliance*, the game switches between 'free' movement and turn-based shootouts as appropriate, and the action itself is true to the genre (if not particularly tactical). Overall, it's moderately playable, but certainly never approaches the standard of *Jagged Alliance* or *UFO: Aftermath*. This is one game that's probably best left to the Russians.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

53

Bad cops

MADDEN 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESires P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Here we go again, sports fans. Paul Presley kicks off a new season...

FEAR THE 'D'!

Or if you're able to converse in something approximating the Queen's English (as opposed to the garbled nonsensical utterings they claim as a language over in the Americas), we mean you should be wary of the defensive players on the sporting team of your choice.

You see, EA Sports has finally got around to addressing the only real issue that people have had with the *Madden* series to date – namely that the defensive game is piss-poor. As is the norm with EA Sports titles, each new year brings a clutch of new 'features' – the main ones here being improved defensive controls and a 'storyline' mode, which really just equates to ongoing newspaper reports and the EA Sports Radio program blaring away between games, telling you how great your team is or where you're going wrong.



Hut, hut, hut etc...

What's more, it works. The career mode (or 'franchise mode', hammering home the capitalist nature of the American sporting system) is far more involving than before and you have a far clearer idea of what's expected of you.

Otherwise though, it's pretty much the same game as before. The glitz, glamour and presentation are all as

comprehensive and atmospheric as ever (although as always it's nowhere near as good as it is on console), and the gameplay is as authentic an experience as an American Football fan could need.

One quibble comes with the ugly texturing of the player models – perhaps a hangover from the console versions, or



"Ouch. It really hurts!"



maybe just misjudged artistic direction. Either way, they need fixing. And that's about that. See you next year!

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

84

Almost proper football

You can find demo versions of all these games on the CD & DVD. Try 'em then buy 'em...

IndieZone



Big-budget, big-team games are so passé – DIY gaming is where it's at. Nobody knows this better than Anthony Holden, and he's here to share his pick of underground goodness...

JETS'N'GUNS

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Rake In Grass | jng.rakeingrass.com



You only get one life, though you can take quite a few hits before going poof.

PERHAPS THE best-looking indie game this month is *Jets'n'Guns*, a side-scrolling shooter in the tradition of *Scramble*, *R-Type* and quantum particle physics. Which is to say, it's rather tough. Indeed, even on Novice level, *Jets'n'Guns* is so hard that most people will never see beyond the first level, despite a patch that supposedly tones down the challenge.

Part of the problem is that familiar ploy used by modern shoot 'em ups – making the weapon effects so over-the-top that you can't make sense of anything on the screen, in this case compounded by the fact that you have precious little room to manoeuvre.

Despite this, JNG is definitely one of the best shmups to come out of 2004, with a rich palette of weaponry and countless touches of class. We particularly like the way the tiny soldiers bail out of ruined enemy ships, only to explode in a puff of crimson when they get caught in the gunfire.

Ultimately, you could spend ten quid on *Jets'n'Guns* and still be trying to beat it on your deathbed, and that has to count for something.

PCZONE VERDICT

77



Was it something I said?

AFTER THE END

■ \$19.99 (£10.50) | Dev: Kraisoft Entertainment | www.kraisoft.com/aftertheend

WHAT A VACUOUS, wafer-thin excuse for a game this is.

After The End is an isometric third-person shooter of the most tedious variety, offering a 360-degree shooting mechanic and a near-infinite supply of cannon fodder. The idea is to strafe around aimlessly within a series of tiny, cheerless environments, taking down hordes of creatures with a dull and predictable set of weapons. Not only does this involve very little in the way of skill, it offers

nothing that even vaguely resembles enjoyment. It's simply a complicated way of wasting time.

Scarily enough, this is actually a clone of some other, slightly less monotonous games, most notably *Alien Shooter* (issue 141, 76 per cent). Apparently, games of this sort are making a bit of a splash in indie sales charts at the moment – why is anyone's guess. As far as we're concerned, *After The End* is entirely without worth or purpose – the gaming equivalent of daytime telly.

PCZONE VERDICT

21



Pint not included.

ON THE OCHE

■ \$19.99 (£10.50) | Dev: Series One Software | www.seriesonesoftware.com

DARTS IS TRULY the sport of kings, but it translates poorly to videogame form, mainly because there's so little to it. I mean, it's just a board and some darts – it's not like you can bring in new weapons or environments to flesh things out. 'Darts – now with railgun!' – it just wouldn't work, would it? As such, darts works fine as a mini-game in something like *Pool Paradise*, but will never stand up as a game in its own right.

On The Oche is no exception. It does a passable job of

simulating the noble art of pub arrows, with 3D graphics and a generic tri-click system for delivery. World Cup, pub tournament and skill challenges are all on offer, fleshed out with some reasonable atmospheric background noise.

As freeware it would be fantastic – especially the two-player mode – but a tenner is a mite rich. Try the demo (on our cover discs) and leave it at that.

PCZONE VERDICT

51

BREAKQUEST

\$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Nurium Games | www.nurium.com



INDIE
GAME OF
THE MONTH



There's a powerful 'one more go' factor at work here. Guns and rockets also play a part.

Indie gaming at its most inventive.

ONE OF THE key hazards of reviewing shareware games is the never-ending, brain-battering parade of *Breakout*/*Arkanoid* clones. Thank the gods then for *BreakQuest*, the most vibrant and inventive example of the form we've seen in ages.

Where most such games simply add

more elaborate graphics and bigger explosions, *BreakQuest* takes the kitchen sink approach to game design. Every new level is completely different from the last, with a different set of rules, hazards and ever more bewildering power-ups.

One minute you're firing at blocks swinging from delicate wires, the next at

pool balls on a green baize. One level is based on *Space Invaders*, complete with scuttling invaders and bonus points for the mother ship, while another mimics *Asteroids*.

The use of physics is excellent throughout – not only do objects move, swing and bounce correctly,

but you can exert 'gravity' to make your ball change directions.

We might not go so far as to say it's the *Half-Life 2* of *Arkanoid* games, but it's certainly the most fun we've had breaking blocks in a while.

PCZONE VERDICT

81

COSMO BOTS

\$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Retro 64 | www.retro64.com/cosmobots.asp



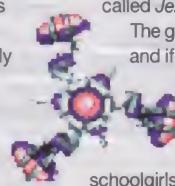
For the Qix enthusiast, it's all about getting the perfect clear.

THERE'VE BEEN A million remakes of Taito puzzler *Qix* over the years, many of them spicing up the action with pictures of naked ladies and anime jailbait in sailor suits. The aim, of course, was to gradually carve away the play-field by drawing lines and boxes, avoiding the roving enemies or, better yet, trapping and destroying them as you went.

Cosmo Bots is a slight twist on the concept, foregoing the soft porn but adding a free-roaming marker that isn't

restricted to the edge of the play-field. In fact, it's more of a cross between *Qix* and an ancient bit of Microsoft software called *Jezzball*.

The gameplay is simple and repetitive, and if you haven't been a big fan of *Qix* or *Jezzball* in the past, there won't be much here to keep you. In the absence of scantily clad Japanese schoolgirls, *Cosmo Bots* is little more than a well-executed homage.



PCZONE VERDICT

62



Fiendish in its simplicity.

REVOLVED

\$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Alter Ego Studios | www.revolvedgame.com

THERE ARE SOME games you just know aren't good for you, and *Revolved* is one of them. As soon as you start playing this devilish puzzler you know that to really get into it, you're going to have to commit yourself to a hypnotic state of mind, one where the higher brain functions are switched off and you're operating on pure, habituated reflex. It's the sort of thing the Russians might have used to prep a US spy just prior to brainwashing, but it's also ruddy addictive.

The concept is as simple as they come: coloured lines (or 'fuses') are

arrayed on a rectangular grid, and you have to rotate the squares in the grid to make boxes of the same colour, preferably extremely quickly.

The real skill of the game is in setting up combos and creating cascading domino effects, though it's about this time that you realise you've gone permanently boss-eyed. Sadly there's no two-player mode involved in the game, but *Revolved* is nonetheless scarily consuming.

PCZONE VERDICT

70

REPLAY

Like a car boot sale without the rain and mud,
Anthony Holden shows his wares

COMMANDOS 3

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: February

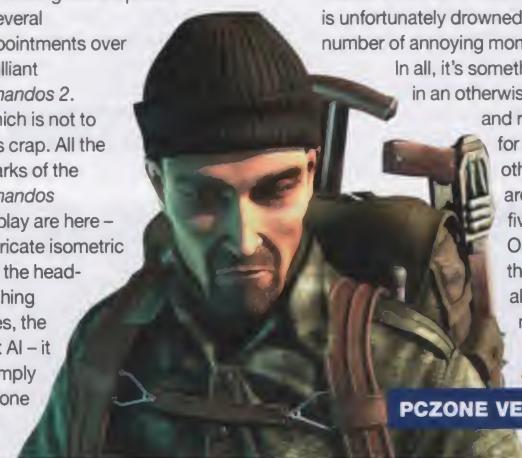
TO THIS day, the *Commandos* games sit in a class of their own. Though there are a few shameless imitators, nothing compares to the blend of puzzle, strategy, stealth and shooting contained in their meticulously crafted worlds. Nevertheless, the third game in the *Commandos* series is the weakest of the three, offering few surprises and several disappointments over the brilliant *Commandos 2*.

Which is not to say it's crap. All the hallmarks of the *Commandos* gameplay are here – the intricate isometric detail, the head-scratching puzzles, the robust AI – it just simply isn't done to the

same high standard. The environments, for example, are nowhere near as imaginative or varied as before, the solutions to the puzzles are not as elegant or satisfying, the characters not as interesting.

There is one particularly fine Omaha Beach level that eschews squad-based stealth in favour of mass carnage, but this is unfortunately drowned by a far greater number of annoying moments.

In all, it's something of a flat note in an otherwise superb series, and remains strictly for veterans of the other games. Both are available for a fiver in the Sold Out range, making this an expensive alternative – which means the score stays the same as a year ago.



PCZONE VERDICT **79**



The big new thing in C3 was the multiplayer game, which never took off.

PRISONER OF WAR

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: February

AN ORIGINAL idea I suppose – a World War II game with no action, no guns and no excitement. Instead, it's a real-time adventure game set in POW camps, where you have to engineer a series of escapes and avert a German missile plot. The gameplay mostly involves finding items, talking to NPCs and stealing stuff, with a bit of stealth thrown in for added tension.

Needless to say, it can all get a bit dull, especially as the only weapons at your disposal are pebbles, and the most advanced stealth gadget available is a smudge of boot polish. Sam Fisher would be beside himself.

There is a certain B-grade charm to the game, but even this is smothered by a slapdash console conversion that bequeaths a woeful interface and numerous camera problems. All in all, we wouldn't waste our time.



It's really not an enticing prospect...



...but that Great Escape game's worse.

PCZONE VERDICT

53

SPACE TRIPPER

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: February



"A deconstruction of everything the PC stands for," said one journalist. Piffle.

NOW HERE'S a bizarre story. *Space Tripper* is a top-down 2D shoot 'em up that came out of the shareware scene back in 2001. It took a cue from *Defender*, in that you could flip directions to face enemies coming from either side of the screen. Not a bad idea, and coupled with good looks and a high degree of challenge, it was one of the better indie games around that time. And normally that would have been the end of it.

However, after its release one or two reviewers got a bit over-excited and, perhaps lured by the cachet of retro credibility, awarded it some stupendously

inflated scores, justified only very marginally by the fact that the game cost just £8 as a download.

Spurred on by its overzealous critical reception, the game eventually got released on a 'budget' label for £9.99, becoming one of only a few games whose prices have actually risen when they went to budget. Now it's generously been dropped to a fiver.

It's still a good game, but if you really want to support indie gaming, we suggest the £8 download on the website.

PCZONE VERDICT

68



TOCA with a plot. But no phat urban beats.

TOCA RACE DRIVER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: February

IT ONLY MADE it to PC a couple of years ago, but already *TOCA Race Driver* looks like a bit of a dinosaur. Not only because *Race Driver 2* was so much better and more comprehensive, but because it's so badly out of touch.

It's sad because this was a valiant attempt to rejuvenate the genre. Faced with a stagnant *TOCA* franchise, Codies decided that adding a plot-based campaign was the way forward, stuffing the game with cut-scenes and casting you as rookie driver Ryan McKane. You

have to laugh, but how could the developer have known that as little as a year later racing games would be hot again, not because of storylines, but because of so-called tuner culture and all the urban gurning that goes with it.

As such, *Race Driver* looks a bit bland and unexciting compared with this season's offerings, but if you're looking for a competent, old-fashioned racer it's still not a bad option.

PCZONE VERDICT

70

COMMAND & CONQUER: RENEGADE

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: February

It's time has past but the *Renegade* legacy lives on. In Source.

WAIT! BEFORE you snort like a Frenchman and skip to the next review, there's something you should know.

Despite all our predictions to the contrary, *C&C: Renegade*, Westwood's attempt at shoehorning the C&C formula into an FPS framework, is not dead. Yes, the single-player game was a widely acknowledged cock-up, but thanks to the efforts of some die-hard modders, the multiplayer game is still enjoyed today.

Now, I'm not suggesting you buy the game for this reason – if you haven't

played it by now you've probably missed the boat. But the people behind some of the best mods for the game are now working on a *Renegade*-inspired mod for *Half-Life 2*, with a full single-player campaign and multiplayer game (called *A Path Beyond and The Dead 6* respectively). It could be great, it could be the first-person C&C we always wanted. Unfortunately for Sold Out, it's also a great reason not to buy this game.

PCZONE VERDICT

50

50

WARLORDS IV: HEROES OF ETHERIA

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: February



This shouldn't tax your 3D card too much. Unless it's 100 years old.

THESE TURN-BASED

fantasy games have changed little in the last few centuries. The graphics are just as unsightly, the mechanics just as simple, the gameplay just as addictive. *Warlords IV*, the latest in the turn-based branch of the family, presents a more streamlined account of the formula, doing away with many of the management options in favour of more combat.

The combat system too has altered, taking a cue from card-based games such as *Magic: The Gathering* and allowing you

to choose the order in which units and spells are deployed.

Despite this, the premise is more or less the same. Explore a vast land with a party of heroes and beasts and conquer fortresses as you go. Along the way you engage in battles with a variety of fearsome foes, accruing experience and followers. It's as entertaining and repetitive as any of these games, and definitely worth a look for inveterate goblin-fanciers.

PCZONE VERDICT

76

LEFTOVERS

► PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

There are some people who think you're an idiot, and that you'll buy anything if it's put in a box and slapped on an unsuspecting shelf. Case in point. Some closeted imbecile/accountant has decided it would be a good idea to reissue the ancient *Championship Manager Season 00/01* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out February). This would be fine in principle – an excellent game in its time – but to charge actual money for the item? I think not. *Champ Man 4*, a relatively contemporary version of the world's premier sports management game, is already available for under a tenner. You, as they say across the pond, do the math: 30 per cent.

From footie fields to snow fields, we have *Ski Park Manager* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out February), one of the more esoteric examples of the tycoon genre and testament to its lack of good ideas. Given the setting, the word abominable seems strangely appropriate. At 27 per cent, we'd rather gorge on yellowed snow.

Equally esoteric, but without the drawback of being shat by the devil himself, is *Haegemonia* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out February), a space strategy game from the makers of *Imperium Galactica*. Fair to behold and rich with tactical gameplay, it earns a solid 78 per cent.

And so to our final offering, the venerable *Zeus: Master Of Olympus* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out February). A strategy/management game in the classical mould (ho ho), it was at one time the greatest god game on the PC. Five years on, it's something of a relic, but its intricate isometric cityscapes are still surprisingly appealing. 70 per cent. And that, my hirsute friends, is your lot.

*Ski Park Manager*: very white.*Haegemonia*: very dark.*Zeus: MOS*: very old.

FEEDBACK

Will Porter discovers that 'feedback' is actually an anagram of 'beakceddf', before writing up your interesting musings

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. To get your views in print, all you have to do is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

REVIEWED ISSUE 149 (BY RICHIE SHOEMAKER), SCORE: 88%

What we thought

Like its predecessor, it effortlessly takes the best of every style of gaming and mixes it into a consistent and enduringly charming whole.

What you said

I got the game two weeks ago and can't stop playing it. It's balanced perfectly with a good mixture of RTS and RPG, and a good storyline. The mini-games are great. There are only two problems I can think of though: first, it needs multiplayer; and second, its stealth sections are too slow and too dull. I'd have given it a classic award – it beats *Half-Life 2* in my eyes.

Toppmatt

I feel that you gave *Pirates!* a higher score than it deserved, and by quite some way. You did mention the main gripes (especially the ludicrous attempt at stealth), but I still think this is a 50-60 per cent game at most. It

has all the depth of a Mills & Boon 'Poor, Naked Guy on Cover Wins the Heart of Silly Rich Tart' book and is ridiculously easy. The sword-fighting scenes are nothing short of ham-fisted and the dancing is handled in an extremely poor manner.

hustlin_pimp

Richie's comment

Now I wouldn't go quite so far as to claim it's better than *Half-Life 2*, but clearly the young Mr Toppmatt has his head screwed on properly. His summation of my review is quite accurate and as a consequence, right on the button. On the other hand, Pimp is clearly not happy with the faux-Disney approach that Sid Meier has taken with the graphics, or indeed the low-fi gameplay employed. True, *Pirates!* certainly isn't some ultra-realistic hardcore simulation, but it does have plenty going for it and offers much more meaningful entertainment than something like *The Sims*.

CITY OF HEROES

REVIEWED ISSUE 149 (BY PAUL PRESLEY) SCORE: 77%

What we thought

Until it expands, *City Of Heroes* is merely the best start of a game we've ever seen.

What you said

Your review of *City Of Heroes* in your Christmas issue displayed either incompetence or unprofessionalism to a degree I find staggering. If Paul Presley had shown a level of interest in

the game appropriate to one in his position, he would have seen on the Official Cryptic Boards and no doubt heard in-game of the current lawsuit Marvel Industries is pursuing against Cryptic Studios and NCSoft for (Marvel claims) encouragement of trademark infringement. If Marvel wins, *City Of Heroes* will be closed down and the code given to Marvel.

Presley's talk of 'expertly crafted famous hero knock-offs' does no good whatsoever to *CoH* and its community, and little good to his credentials as a journalist, especially as in the EULA of the game, players are expressly forbidden from creating clones of any trademarked heroes. This is also common knowledge and adhered-to lore among the majority of serious *CoH* players – if some kid makes a

'Wolverine' as Presley puts it, then a seasoned player will usually warn the offender and petition the GMs, who will definitely take action to change the hero's name and/or costume, whichever is necessary.

Adrian Smith

Prez's comment

Well now, someone's cage has been well and truly rattled. The review was written (and indeed published) months before Marvel instigated its lawsuit, at which time the servers were chock-full of 'expertly-crafted famous hero knock-offs', with little being done at the time to remove them. You may want to take some of your own advice and show a level of interest in this



Ladies with little clothes and a pole? It'll never catch on.

"Want to be a games tester? Then buy *Vampire* today and play your way through a genuine beta release"

KING_CLUELESS DOESN'T MINCE HIS WORDS

magazine to see that we ran a lead news article in the very next issue of Online Zone, shortly after the story broke.

Hawkmoon83

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

REVIEWED ISSUE 150 (BY MARTIN KORDA), SCORE: 86%

What we thought

Despite its shortcomings and glitches, *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines* is still



beautifully chilling and captivating.

Want to be a games tester? Then buy *Vampire - Bloodlines* today and play your way through a genuine beta release. Explore a truly immersive world with great characters and an awesome storyline that despite numerous graphic/sound bugs will keep you coming back for more. Battle against the control glitches as you take on the many varied enemies! Make friends online as they teach you how to use console codes to progress through occasional crashes! Be part of the community who are trying to finish what could be (when finished) a true classic! Activision needs your help today.

A score of 86 per cent? Does Korda give a chef a tip for serving up uncooked food? I imagine he'd do the same as me – give him a slap and tell him to get back in the kitchen.

King_clueless

What you said

Vampire really has really pulled me, but then I'm a sucker for a deep story. It makes a refreshing change to be confronted with such adult themes. My biggest niggle is the random physics engine; in one room big boxes will be moveable, in another you won't be able to budge ones smaller than your own head.

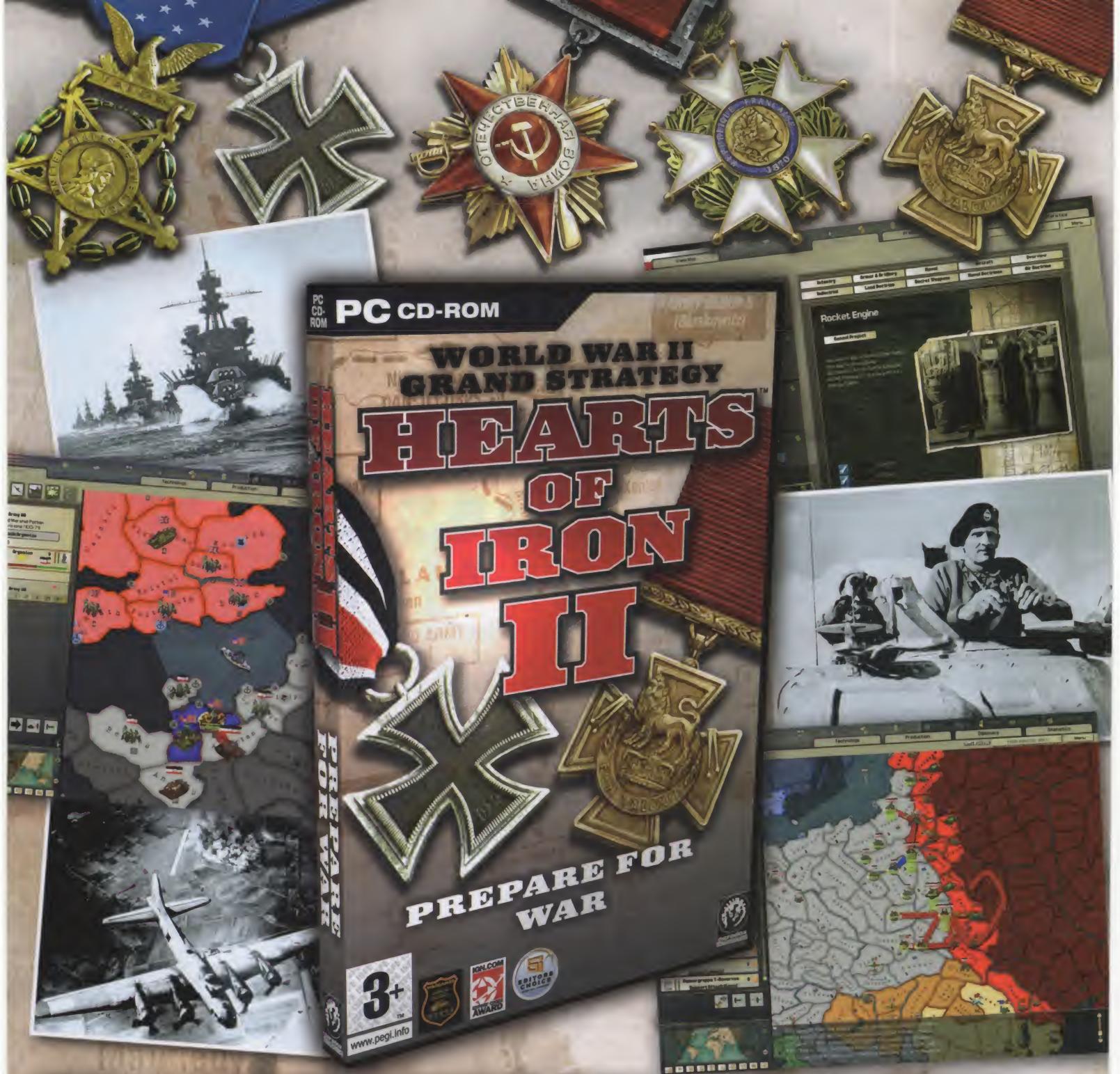
Graphically, it hasn't detracted from my enjoyment of the game either – I was surprised to hear how many people have been disappointed in the visuals. The people look great, lip sync is very good and they're fairly emotive too. Also, I haven't

Martin's comment

Slapping a chef for serving up raw food? Do you not know I eat my meals straight from the cow, while it's still grazing in the field? As for *Vampire*, no it's certainly not the finished product, but shining through from the mire of bugs is a supremely crafted game. As I said in the review, had it not been for the shortcomings it would easily have been a Classic. If you can put up with the glitches (and admittedly these shouldn't have been there in the first place), then you'll find one of the best RPGs of recent years lurking beneath. □



Strictly Come Dancing goes period.



**WE ARE STILL MASTERS OF OUR FATE.
WE ARE STILL CAPTAINS OF OUR SOULS.**

SIR WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Award-winning Hearts of Iron II will be hitting UK stores next! Paradox Interactive's latest Grand Strategy PC game has received praise from the gaming community world-wide. Now it's your turn to play any frontline during World War II and relive the most dynamic period in history as democracy, communism and fascism clash in battles that will decide the fate of the entire world!

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"The single greatest strategic level wargame of all time." Wargamer * Award for Excellence *

"The most complex and rewarding World War 2 strategy game to date." IGN 87% * Editors Choice Award *

"Paradox Interactive holds the genre of historical strategic games in an iron fist." Boomtown 90%

SHIPPING TO STORES FEB 18.

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Pride before the fall. He's a vision in red, I'm sure you'll agree.



Tin cans on wheels. What a great idea.



REAL

VS

NOT REAL



REALITY CHECK: FLATOUT

Steve Hill risks life and limb for your entertainment. Again...

HERE'S A GOOD idea. Let's re-enact a game in which cars catch fire, get mangled beyond recognition and the drivers are flung through the windscreens. Who can we get as a driver? It can't be me – I don't have a licence. Through several layers of high-powered PR, this information is filtered through to the organisers of London's premier stock car venue. The response: "Can he see?"

Despite my best efforts, I'm in, as confirmed by an email: "Apparently u don't need a licence but have to be able to (a) see and (b) not be a retard." Good...

A murky evening in Wimbledon Stadium provides the setting, and the warning signs are there from the start.

WHAT'S A REALITY CHECK?

Reality Check is a feature comparing PC games to their real-life equivalents. Or at least, as close as we can get without risking serious bodily harm.

As my taxi pulls up to the car park, an ambulance is pulling out. Momentarily, we're caught in a game of chicken, a less truncated version of which apparently did for the bloke in the ambulance. His evening is over, but mine has only just begun. Running late (having just flown in from a cheese-eating holiday in France), it's mildly bewildering – not least for the panicked PR man, who urgently issues me with regulation orange overalls and what appears to be a child's helmet. Minutes later, I emerge from the bogs looking like an Action Man version of a Kwik-Fit fitter.

There's no time for vanity though, as I'm whisked to the pits – signing waivers on the hoof – and am introduced to my car. Whatever it used to be, they've done a sterling job, gutting the interior to leave what's essentially a seat on wheels. Before I can take the wheel, further contractual requirements await, and I'm forced to endure the obligatory posing

with scantily-clad Page Three models, who by this stage are extremely cold (either that or they're smuggling peanuts).

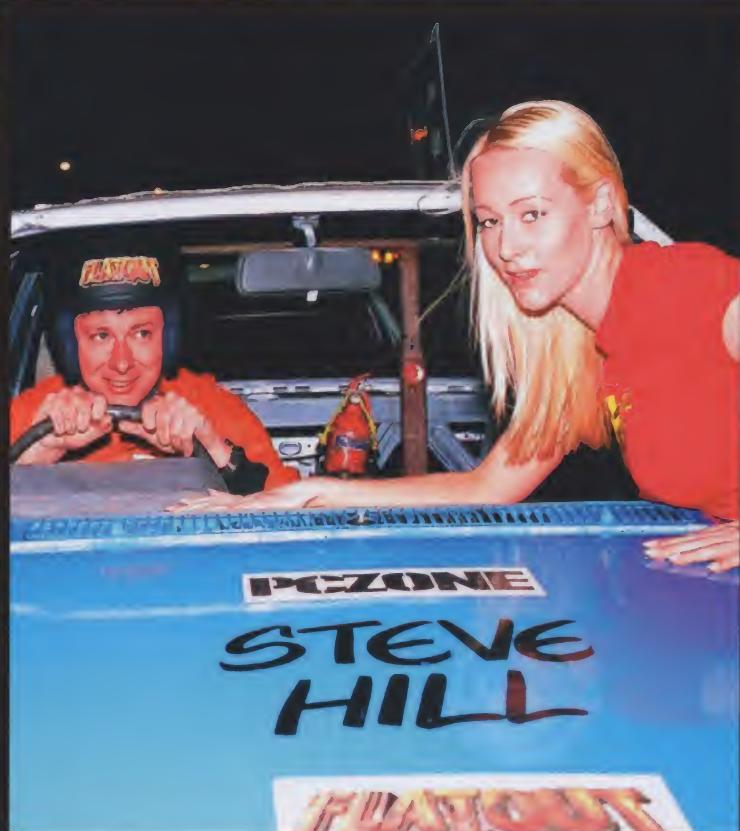
BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

In total, Empire has bought an impressive nine stock cars, all decked out in *FlatOut* livery and piloted by hapless journalists. I've already missed the first race, although the publisher of *PC ZONE* competed, describing it as the most terrifying thing he's ever done on four wheels. Given that I recently chased him round a racetrack in a Formula 3000 car, this doesn't bode well. Indeed, the *FlatOut* numbers are already depleted, with a brace of *Loaded* magazine 'hard men' preferring the sanctuary of the complimentary bar, quaffing wines and scoffing food like dogs.

Elsewhere, it's chav central: amateur tattoos, Burberry caps, Argos jewellery, JJB trackies and self-graffitied cars boasting such legends as 'Crazy', 'Larry',



"Come in number 703, your time is up..."



"Please don't hurt me, I'm a laydee..." "Shut up Steve."

and 'Bad Boy Liam'. With our gleaming new paintjobs, full quotas of teeth and unspoilt fingernails, we might as well have 'Please Kill Me' sprayed on the bonnet. This isn't a stock car race – it's class war.

Easing my way on to the track in the traditionally jerky manner of a non-driver, I'm surprisingly calm. These things can scarcely do more than 40mph. What's the worst that can happen? Taking my position on the grid, a marshal gives my car the once over, holding up the start in order to remove a spare wheel from

the industrial-strength seat belt preventing a *FlatOut*-style exit. Taking my chances, I unbuckle and scamper out of the window.

SHOULDER THE BLAME

Back in the bar, it's all war stories and bragging. With one race still to go, I've pretty much convinced myself that I never want to see the inside of a stock car again and agree to cut my losses, much to the relief of my significant other. However, a couple of beers and some peer pressure later, I'm making a late dash for the pits,

"I might as well have 'Please Kill Me' sprayed on my bonnet. This isn't a stock car race – it's class war"

behind me, casually mentioning that it would have decapitated me at the first hint of impact.

With the life-threatening item removed, we're soon underway, and there's a mildly terrifying moment of realisation where I notice I'm driving in a stock car race in front of a paying audience. Not to worry, it's a piece of piss. Glorified dodgems...

DAYS OF THUNDER

Minutes later, a man is being dragged from an upturned car. Slowing down to survey the wreckage, it's a surreally moving scene, one that in a movie would be accompanied by suitably eerie music. I'm now very frightened indeed. Looking around, there's carnage everywhere, with people actively trying to hurt each other.

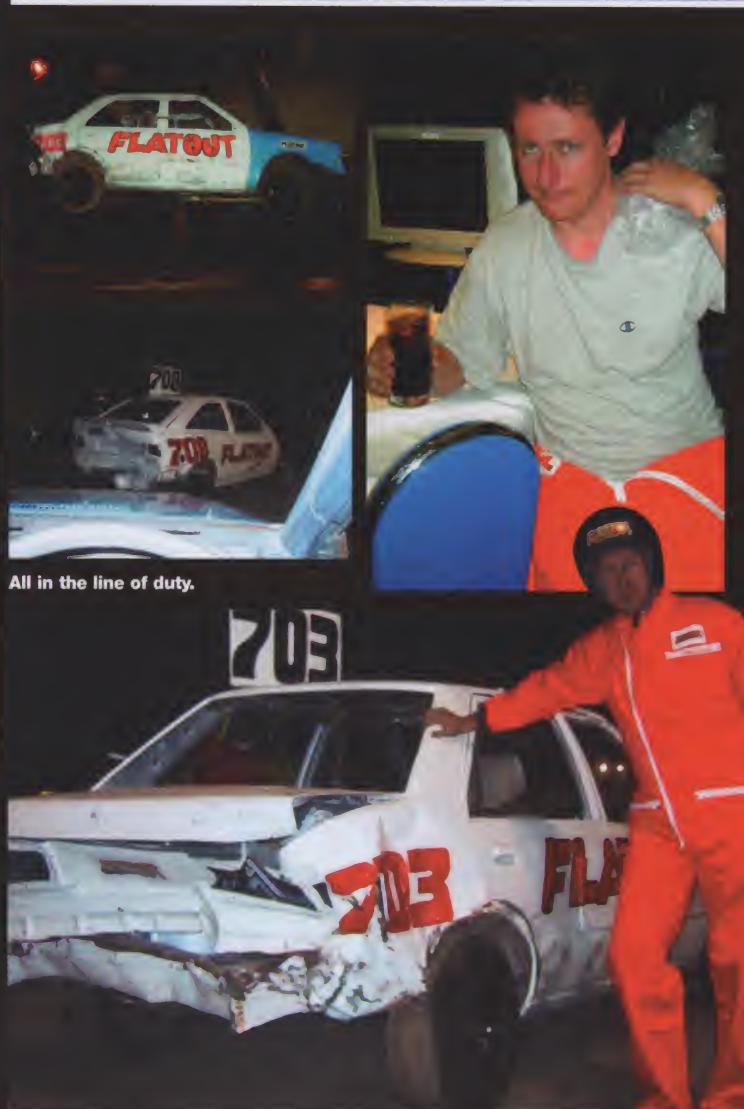
The Crazy Gang of Wimbledon FC may have long since left Plough Lane, but they've been replaced by psychopaths, one of whom slams into the back of me, bucking my head forward and causing the car to spin wildly. Improbably, I retain control and hug the inside lane, praying for it to stop. I soon have my wish, as an unseen chav punts me into the fence, only

with her desperate pleas vainly ringing in my ears as I embark on one more job.

Slightly more relaxed this time, I even attempt to nudge a couple of other cars, but immediately feel guilty doing so. Clearly, the other drivers do not have such issues. According to eyewitness reports, it was two of them that did me. The details are lost in the fog, but when I regain consciousness I'm in the central reservation, with my seat at a macabre angle and my face inches away from the crumpled passenger door. To all intents and purposes, I've been in a car crash.

Reality Check spotters will recall me shattering my right collarbone in a log-falling incident a couple of years ago. By way of symmetry, the searing pain is this time on the left, with the bonus of being felt up by a St John's Ambulance woman.

Heavily anaesthetised, sleep is fitful and painful. The following morning, a persistent ringing sound cuts through the discomfort. In pain, I manage to answer the phone with my one good hand. It's the PR mook, who chirpily asks if I've got a quote for the *FlatOut* advert. I don't think he'll be using my reply... ☺



All in the line of duty.

Steve Hill: the best a chav can get...

HOW REAL IS... FLATOUT?

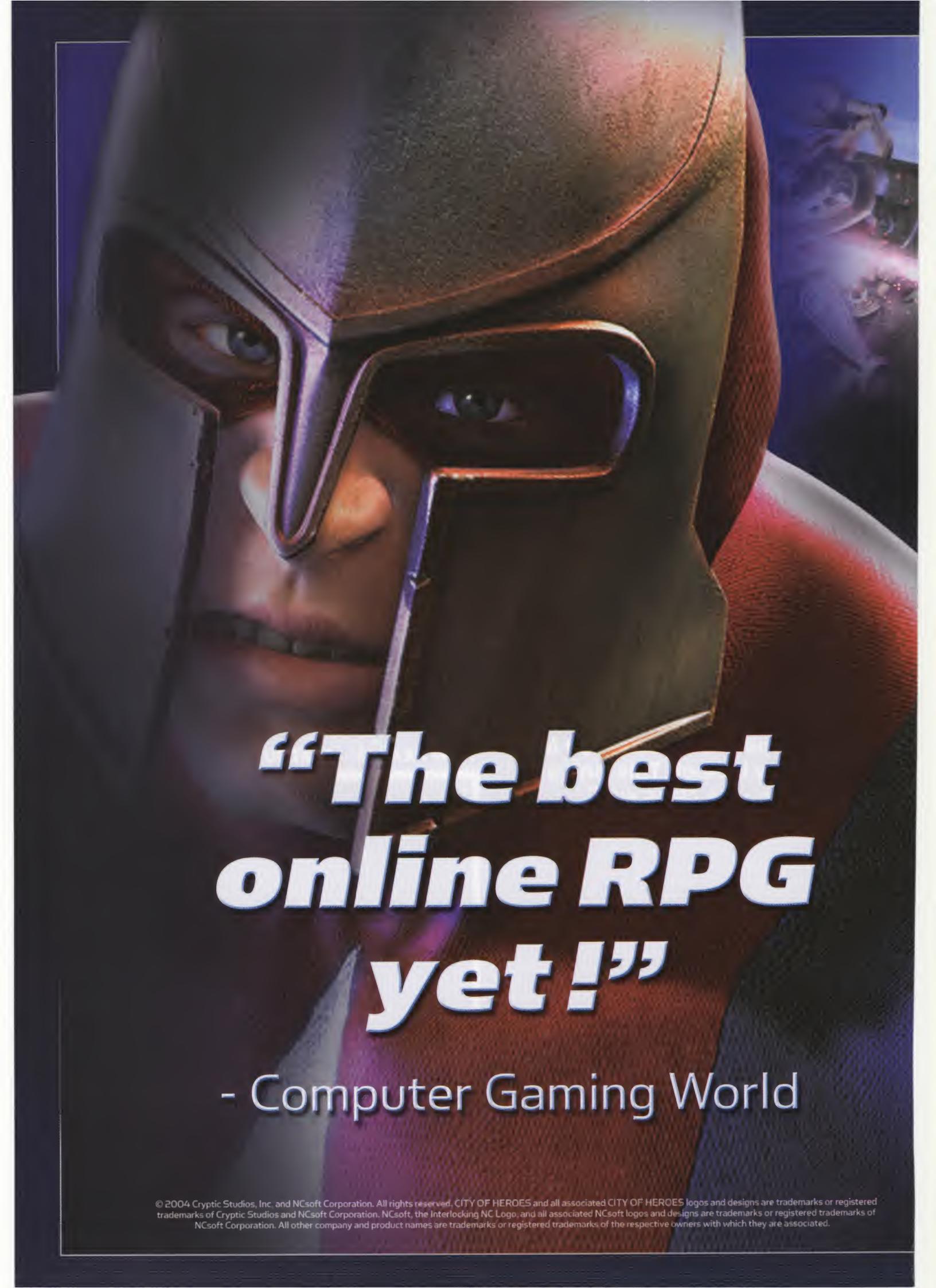


It's official: *FlatOut* does recount the full horror of stock car racing.

CRUNCH TIME

The radios work and the seat belts are non-existent, but otherwise this is actually a terrifyingly realistic portrayal of the experience, and one that brought the horror flooding back. With the cars violently twatting into each other and crumpling like discarded cans of pop, at least the injuries are restricted to a sore thumb.





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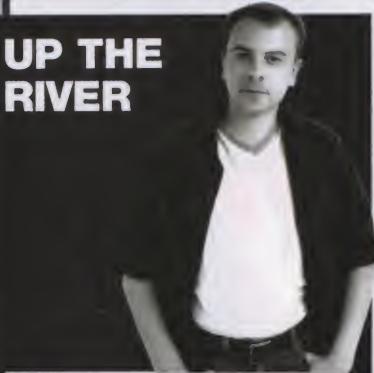
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YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

UP THE RIVER



■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

Alas and alack. Today's editorial missive originates from the depressing environs of the local constabulary, into which I have been incarcerated. You may remember last month saw me fleeing from the scene of a burning – nothing to do with me of course, I merely happened by and routed the real culprits before the gendarmerie were able to arrive. Well due to a lack of petroleum in my automobile's combustion chamber, I was apprehended and blamed for the misdeeds despite all evidence to the contrary.

Still, Mellors has been dispatched forthwith to my legal advocate and I have no doubts that my release shall be procured within the next few hours.

As I gaze around my enclosure, marking my internment in the honoured tradition of carving time's passage into the wall, one cannot help but reflect upon how the notion of punishment is too often ignored when engaging online.

My 'quest', as it were, was failed and the consequences are all too apparent. My time is robbed from me along with my freedom. Should I fail in a world such as Norrath or Rubi-ka, the worst I can expect is a temporary lowering of my ability to inflict damage and occasionally a journey to rescue my belongings.

Perhaps we should take failure more seriously. What if you were allowed no resurrection or respawn? What if upon death you entered another world? More so than WOW's simplistic ghostly 'afterlife'. A proper purgatory in which your resurrection must be earned through retribution of your actions? Your thoughts are welcome on this matter, but for now I must cease my musings as I hear my cell door unbolting. Blessed freedom is once again to be mine. Huzzah!



"You're expanding a bit yourself. In the gut."



BIG TWO GET BIGGER

EXPANSIONS, UPDATES AND ADD-ONS FOR EVERQUEST II AND WOW

SOE HAS had a busy winter, spending most of the long, dark, cold nights huddled round the planning table working out the details for *EverQuest II*'s first set of expansion packs.

Unlike the prior *EQ* model, *EQII*'s team is splitting upgrades to the game into three types: regular monthly updates, standard expansion packs released twice a year, and brand new 'adventure packs'.

Although we say 'standard' expansion packs, SOE has changed the way it works on them by maintaining two separate teams, both developing one pack each, rather than the old method of having one team moving from one pack to the next in sequential order. The packs promise more than just the usual new landmasses, extra weapons and enhanced abilities, with the first pack (due some time in the second half of 2005) set to introduce 'radically

new gameplay elements that have never been seen before in online games,' according to SOE anyway.

Meanwhile, the adventure packs are a sort of halfway house, providing limited story-driven adventuring theme parks as an optional purchase, based around the old tabletop RPG 'module' model and designed to further the back story of Norrath. A five-level dungeon, for instance, would provide the first level free for everyone, then require a \$5 purchase from anyone wishing to journey further.

Aside from the expansion plans, *EQII* also recently underwent the first major freely downloadable upgrade since its launch. Along with some 76 new quests, the update added two new dungeons for mid- to high-level character groups, fixed a myriad of bugs, introduced over 200 new spells and combat arts, improved the

Friends List window, and added a brand new training option. Every ten levels you'll be able to further customise your alter ego by gaining a new ability. Additionally, most of the new quests have been aimed at the solo player, addressing one of the main complaints to be levelled at the game.

What of *World Of Warcraft*, though? While talk of expansion packs is thin on the ground, Blizzard has recently revealed details on the forthcoming *Battlegrounds* update, designed to take the PvP side of the game closer to the large-scale battles seen in traditional *Warcraft* titles.

The idea is to have large teams of multi-level Alliance and Horde players entering special areas, battling for control with ground, air and siege weapons. While the high-level players will no doubt want to be at the forefront of the action, lower-level characters can still take part by taking part in dangerous resource gathering missions in the zone, designed to provide their army with better weapons and armour. Blizzard hasn't announced when the Battlefields will go live, but sources tell us that we're looking at some time shortly after the European launch of the game this spring.



Battlegrounds will feature large-scale warfare.





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THE MATRIX ONLINE

Just how deep is the rabbit hole?



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WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Better than EQII? We tell you



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EVE ONLINE: EXODUS

The universe keeps expanding



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NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill meets the Pharaohs

Europe... Saved!

CITY OF HEROES REACHES ISSUE 3, GETS OFFICIAL EUROPEAN RELEASE

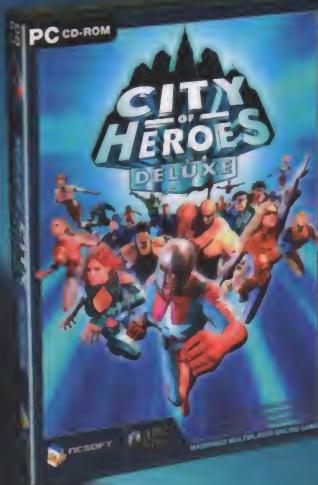
The 5th Column take arms.



Holy smoke!

WIN! CITY OF HEROES DELUXE EDITION

Five copies of the people's MMOG to be won



WITH THE European release now upon us, we've teamed up with the caped crusaders at NCsoft to offer you the chance to suit up for action yourself with five copies of *City Of Heroes* waiting to be rescued from a villain's lair. Or our stock cupboard in the corner anyway.

This is the Deluxe DVD edition (see above for details) and comes with all the extras, as well as a complimentary one-month free trial period. To win a copy of the game, simply answer the following question:

What 'famous' film superhero did Michael Crawford play in 1981?

A: Eagleman B: Falconman C: Condorman

Send your answer before Wednesday, March 2 on the back of a postcard or envelope to: *City Of Heroes* Competition, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.

THE A-Z OF MMOs

ONLINE GAMING EXPLAINED**A**

A is for *Adventure*. People often complain about the lack of true adventure seen in MMOs, claiming that taking packages from one place to another or killing repeated numbers of rats hardly compares with the thrilling quests of the literary classics. But when you stop to consider it, what was Dante's pilgrimage through Hell if not a long stroll through a sewer? What was Frodo's ring journey if not an extended courier job? MMOs are merely continuing the long tradition of taking the mundane realities of modern life and dressing them in alternative clothing. Of course by that token, the real-life heroes of today aren't the soldiers, firemen and doctors, but the postmen.

A is also for *Anarchy Online*, a sci-fi MMO that, despite its age, is still packing them in. It's one of the strangest virtual worlds to find yourself in, packed with a bewildering array of near-impenetrable nanotechnology-themed game mechanics and content. It also sports some of the skimpiest female clothing outside of an Eric Prydz video, made all the more disturbing by the fact that the majority of the players living out these couture fantasies are men.

Finally, **A** is for *A Tale In The Desert*. Aside from earning the accolade of being one of the (very) few MMOs to have Steve Hill actually requesting an account, it's also notable for eschewing the entire notion of violence from its gameplay. Instead players get to weave flax, build pyramids and create art from camel shit. And they say this genre's for nerds...

CLAN DIARY

SCEE

SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

Picture the scene: a gathering of women in a kitchen, somewhere in the UK. One girl shows off her new tattoo – it looks exactly like that of the girl next to her. A *Half-Life* lambda symbol. It could only be the SCEE Ladies festive social! A good Counter-Striking year was had by all, but we vow to make this one even better. Holiday inactivity dwindling, thoughts turn to this year's upcoming events. The E-Sports World Cup (ESWC) will be held, as usual, in July, but the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) have moved their dates to coincide with this. Naughty.

However, those of you who have kept up with this column from the beginning will recall last year's ESWC adventures. It's not simply a competition, it's a celebration, and I'm sure that most European gamers will choose this event over the CPL – which brings me on to the SCEE Ladies' plans.

"We're always on the look-out for new talent, so make our lives easier and get your sisters, girlfriends, wives or mothers playing!"



Big things are expected of the ladies...

Although still six months away, our preparation for the ESWC will begin now. All busy women with jobs, studying or kids, we need to begin early! We certainly want to improve on last year's disappointing performance, not leaving the group stages. Great Britain hasn't proven too great on the international Counter-Strike stage in the past, and we're determined to change that.

The team itself has been through a good few changes since the previous event. Three of the attendees of last year's competition have left the team, but I believe we will be in a stronger position this time round. Despite this, we are always on the look-out for new talent, so get your sisters, girlfriends, wives or mothers playing! We are currently looking for new members to complement the already strong team.

While not actually playing C-S, we have been indulging in *Counter-Strike Manager*, a web-based game in the style of *Champ Man*. Big thanks to them for keeping me entertained during our New Year dry spell! Check them out at www.cs-manager.com, but until next time, keep gaming!



HERE BE DRAGONS

Dragons Of Norrath – does exactly what it says on the tin.

EQ CONTINUES TO EXPAND WITH NEW PACK

NEWS FOR the old guard now, with the announcement that the trusty old original *EverQuest* is getting a brand new expansion pack – *Dragons Of Norrath*.

Boasting a wealth of features, from new adventuring zones to explore, to updated guild tools, *DON* makes full

use of the recently updated *EverQuest* engine. There's something of an Eastern flavour to much of it, with the Thundercrest Isles and the Stillmoon Temple filled with Oriental dragons and samurai-like warriors.

New gameplay features include a potion belt for quick access to life-enhancing fluids of all types, and a bandolier used for switching instantly between pre-set weapon arrangements – handy in the thick of battle.

There are also extensive new guild management options, from halls to provide a place to gather, rest and socialise, to guild recruiting tools in order to help swell the ranks.

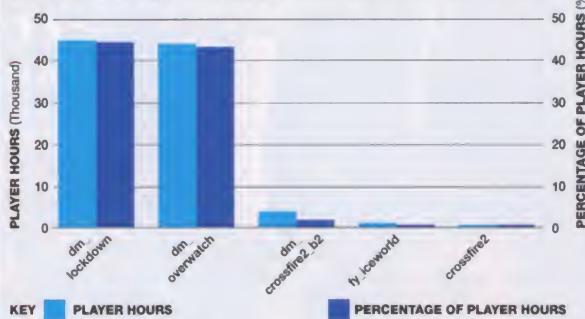
The pack should be landing at stores later this month at the price of £29.99, although existing *EQ* subscribers can pre-order it through SOE's digital download service, earning themselves a price discount in the process. Which is nice.

STATZONE

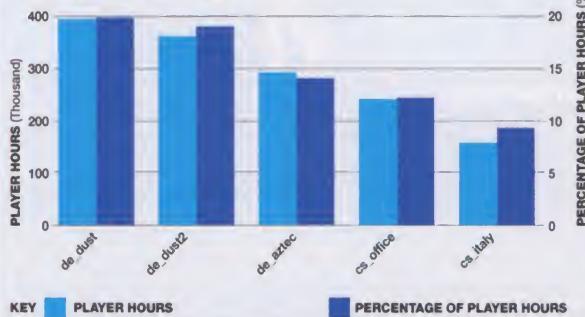
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY:
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TOP FIVE HALF-LIFE 2 DM MAPS (WEEK ENDING JANUARY 10, 2005)



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please visit www.pczone.co.uk**



"No, you're alright. I think it's just melted chocolate."

Jack in the day job and jack into...

THE MATRIX ONLINE

Martin Korda discovers *The Matrix Online* Beta test is out there, and it's looking for us all...

THE MATRIX ONLINE

is coming. It's real. I know, I've seen it. I've lived it. And soon it will have you too. Do you want me to show you what *The Matrix Online* is?

If you take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up on the porcelain throne

you're sitting on while reading this and believe whatever you want to believe (like the lack of bog roll left on that cardboard tube). If you take the red pill and you join me and *The Matrix Online*'s lead designer Toby Ragaini on the other side in the Beta test, we'll show

you how deep the rabbit hole goes...

It's cold. It's really cold. I feel my virtual body stretch as though it's being sucked through an industrial-sized Dyson, flesh seeping away into electrical pulses, followed by a light-speed rush into an alternate dimension. I've just been

'awakened' from my sleep by Zion operatives. Just taken my first step into *The Matrix Online* Beta test.

I blink wildly as my eyes see for the first time. Sprawled into the distance are miles of sleeping men and women in towering banks of fuel cells that feed the machines that now dominate the earth. Welcome, as the man said, to the real world.

But I've no time to gawp. Whisked away by my rescuers, I immediately start my training in a detailed simulated tutorial program, ready to return to the Matrix as a fully-trained Zion operative. "The war in the real world is over and eyes now turn to the action inside the Matrix. Here, a cold war rages with acts of espionage, assassination and counter-intelligence," explains Ragaini as I finish the tutorial and begin the intuitive yet massively detailed character creation process.

After configuring my look, I'm given the choice of specialising as a soldier, a spy or hacker (see 'Totally Skill', p104). "Each character can acquire and load Ability Codes for each mission, allowing an unprecedented degree of customisation and flexibility," explains Ragaini as I ready

THE DETAILS

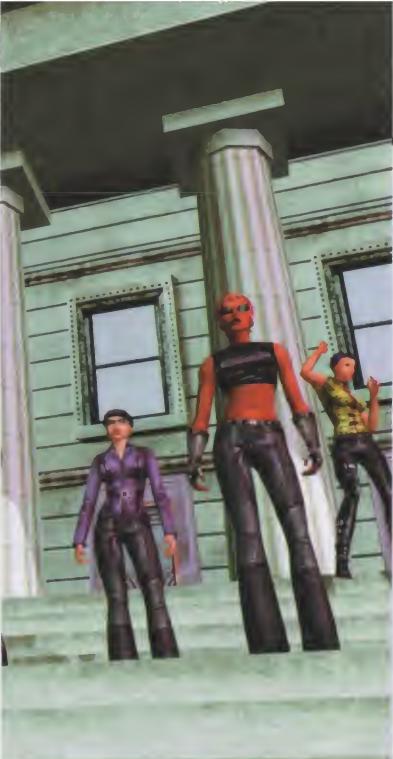
DEVELOPER Monolith Productions
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE www.thematrixonline.com
ETA Spring 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Will shape the next chapter of *The Matrix*
- Massive input from the Wachowski brothers
- Thrilling tactile combat
- Set to feature all the surviving characters from *Revolutions*
- Seamless gameplay with no loading screens



"Here, you dropped this bullet."



CV

MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

The Seattle-based development house just keeps getting bigger and more respected thanks to its constant flow of top quality games, though *The Matrix Online* is its first MMOG. Here's just a small collection of Monolith's hits to date...

1997 The team makes a solid start with 3D FPS *Blood*.

1998 *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*, an excellent anime-themed FPS receives wide critical acclaim, but the public prove too obsessed with *Half-Life* to give it the attention it deserves, damn them.

2000 We didn't think much of Cate Archer's first outing in *No One Lives Forever*, but there were many people who did.

2001 Monolith scares us all to death with the superb *Aliens Vs. Predator 2*.

2002 *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy In H.A.R.M.'s Way* proves an excellent sequel packed with humour and ingenious action. We loved it and many of you did too.

2004 *TRON 2.0* is a solid enough FPS set in the movie nerd's paradise.

2005 *F.E.A.R.* looks set to scare us all to death again, as well as providing ZONE with its best-ever cover (issue 150).



"Yes I know, I have a great arse."

"The Wachowski brothers have created a year-long outline that includes all the major movie characters"

TOBY RAGAINI, LEAD DESIGNER, MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS



myself to jack back in. "The future of the Matrix literally takes place in *The Matrix Online*. The Wachowski Brothers and Paul Chadwick (the scriptwriter) have created a year-long outline that includes all the major movie characters that survived *The Matrix Revolutions*. I even got a call from Andy Wachowski the other day and he was telling me about his character in the Beta test. That's how involved the Wachowskis are." As his words fade I feel a searing stabbing pain in my head causing me to wince in agony. I open my eyes. I'm in.

BACK INSIDE

I'm standing in a courtyard. In all directions spill the concrete confines of a titanic city, dank and uninviting, yet

gargantuan in scope. All around me, fetish wear-clad player-characters sprint around the cracking cement jungle carrying out missions for their masters. *The Matrix Online*'s world (generated by an engine specifically designed for this game) oozes with sinister undertones, perfectly capturing the freakish nature of the movies' denizens and bleak, green-grey shades of the cityscapes.

I run into a nearby building with its unsettlingly cracked walls and damp, peeling wallpaper, then seamlessly run up to the top level to peer down at the spot where I'd stood just seconds earlier.

"The urban oppression of the Matrix is captured in the looming skylines and bleak alleyways," Ragaini explains. "Each building has complete interiors and there

COMBAT TRAINING

WOOHOO, I KNOW KUNG FU. AND AIKIDO. AND HOW TO BITCH SLAP...

Unlike the random hacking of much MMORPG combat, you actually believe that the characters in *TMO* are having real fights, with all of the moves and neat touches from the movies present and correct – right down to the superb thudding sound effects.

While the action is real-time, attacking is turn-based, with each character being given a choice of launching either ranged attacks with weapons, close-ranged martial arts flourishes or point-blank weapon firing. Each attack type can either be executed with speed or more slowly for extra power. You can also choose to block an enemy attack or try to throw them.

The Matrix Online's combat is all about identifying your opponent's weaknesses and exploiting them. Some enemies are adept at dodging bullets but not so good at hand-to-hand combat, while others prefer to duke it out up close and personal. It's also important to know your own strengths. If you specialise in kung fu then you'll excel at punches and kicks, but spend your time studying aikido and you'll be at your best derailing an opponent by throwing or disarming them. The higher your skill level, the more impressive your repertoire of techniques will be.

Thankfully, bullet-time is used sparingly, meaning you never grow tired of seeing slow-mo moves in all their glory, as the action will only employ it when something spectacular happens – such as landing a killer blow on an opponent.

Though still in need of some polish, *The Matrix Online* features potentially the most thrilling combat we've ever seen in a MMOG – fans of the epic movie punch-ups shouldn't be disappointed.



Combat looks and feels just like the fight scenes from the movies.



You know the rules, never hit a woman. Unless you're in the Matrix.



Fight up close or fire from afar.
The choice is yours.



TMO is full of exotic and seedy locales.

are no load times as players transition from exterior to interior and back. You can hyper-jump onto a rooftop, run down a stairway, get in a fire-fight, flee out of a balcony and jump to the ground without experiencing a single load."

CHOOSING SIDES

Enough with the sightseeing, there's a civil war to be fought. Zion isn't the only faction interested in your skills. Dotted around *The Matrix Online* are NPCs who're ready to dish out advice, point you towards communal areas such as clubs (some of which are seedier than a freshly sown field) and sell you items or skills. As



"Careful, my dreads are caught in your zipper."

well as that though, they're also out to seduce you to their organisation's cause.

As Ragaini explains: "As a promising operative, you're occasionally approached by representatives of both the Machines and the Merovingian.

Whether you're receptive to their offers is entirely up to you. The goals for various organisations are dramatically different, and each have separate missions and content that are specific to achieving their agendas."

"The urban oppression of the Matrix is captured in the looming skylines and bleak alleyways within"

TOBY RAGAINI, LEAD DESIGNER, MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

reluctant to reveal whether Neo and Agent Smith will be making a comeback.

"Some characters may, others may not. But trust me when I say that no-one is safe," he says. He also lets slip some tantalising info about a new hugely influential character who'll be making a debut in *The Matrix* universe. "There's a new player in *The Matrix Online* who has a certain military demeanour. But his loyalties are not necessarily clear. Does he offer hope for humanity, or is he just another method of Machine control?"

PILL POPPERS

Time then for my first mission. Punching the number for my operator into the mobile phone, I'm connected to Zion's mission controller (and hot babe) Tyndall, who'll provide me with the bulk of my missions from now on, though others can be acquired from my Matrix-based contacts.

"If you attempt to swap sides, you'll have to start at square one and establish your reputation (which is built by completing key missions) with their newly chosen organisation," states Ragaini. "Since many of the critical missions require you to have high reputation, there's a powerful incentive to stick with one organisation."

The Matrix Online is also set to feature all of the characters that survived the celluloid trilogy, though Ragaini is

"Tyndall, Zion's mission controller, will identify potential Redpills (people inside the Matrix who have become aware of its existence and want out) and give you their location," Ragaini informs me as I wait for my call to connect. "In some cases, these operations go smoothly. In other cases, there are complications. Set-ups and

TOTALLY SKILL

CHOOSE THE PATH THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

The number of skills available in *The Matrix Online* is phenomenal. You start off by acquiring basic Awakened skills such as simple self-defence techniques, after which you're given the choice of specialising in a certain field, be it stealth, combat, firearms or hacking.

These choices then open up a cornucopia of abilities and specialist options. So if you choose to be a martial arts master, you eventually have to pick a particular martial art to specialise in, such as karate, kung fu or aikido.

What's more, there are scores of abilities to learn – you can buy these with Information Points that you accumulate during missions. They range from speed, blocking and damage power-ups to enhanced awareness and the ability to download a mission map.



Do you want to be a brainy hacker/coder or a deadly killer?



Later on, you get to specialise in your chosen field.

While keeping your options open is no bad thing, changing allegiances on a whim won't prove nearly as beneficial, as your shifting loyalties come at a price.

"If you attempt to swap sides, you'll have to start at square one and establish your reputation (which is built by completing key missions) with their newly chosen organisation," states Ragaini. "Since many of the critical missions require you to have high reputation, there's a powerful incentive to stick with one organisation."

The Matrix Online is also set to feature all of the characters that survived the celluloid trilogy, though Ragaini is



Time to get creative.



Like the hair darling. Lose the shades.

Why Don't You?...

I LOVE DRIVING IN MY (VIRTUAL) CAR

Vehicles played a pivotal part of the films (especially in *Reloaded*), so why not give us the chance to get into vehicles and drive/fly around the massive city and maybe throw in some chase scenes too? Maybe enemy organisations could pursue you as you try to deliver a Redpill to an extraction point, or you could suddenly get the call that an enemy PC is in your area and needs chasing down. That way, *The Matrix Online* could be even more exciting and true to the films than it already is. Worth considering? We think so.



Bloody hitchhikers.

ambushes are not unheard of, so it's best that you're prepared for the worst." You also find yourself sent on hacking and infiltration missions as well as daring strikes at enemy operatives as Zion tasks you with taking out key rival faction figures.

In this case though, Tyndall does indeed want me to help free a potential Redpill. A marker appears for me to follow, outlining the direction and distance to the mission objective. It's easy to follow and understand, though the Beta test is still laggy and all too often things are reduced to a chugging mess as the server tries to catch up – crashes are still commonplace – while the somewhat fiddly controls (you can choose from either an FPS or MMOG control system) hinders progress yet further.

AGENT PROVOCATEUR

As I jog to the destination, I spy an agent and duck into a side-alley for fear of my life. Ragaini smiles in amusement.

"Agents are the watchdogs of the system, and they retain that role in *The Matrix Online*. But with the treaty that Neo secured, the humans of Zion are able to freely recruit Redpills without fear of reprisal," he assures me.

"However, the Machines still look unkindly upon any activities that disrupt the simulation for the rest of the humans still trapped in the pods. Furthermore, some



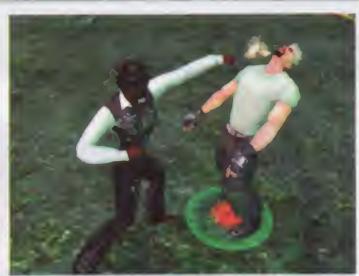
No luck at the barber shop then?

parts of the Matrix are simply off-limits to humans. Anyone who disobeys these restrictions will quickly find that Agents are just as deadly as they were in the films."

Hesitantly, I resume the mission without fear of Agent reprisals, tracking down and speaking to the Redpill identified by Tyndall. He (or in this case a her with a man's name – another regular bug that needs ironing out before the game ships) agrees to follow me to an extraction point. Problem is, another organisation also wants to get its hands on the hermaphrodite, and on our way out of the building we come face to face with our first adversary.

The action switches seamlessly into the real-time/turn-based

combat mode (see 'Combat Training', p103). After a bone-shuddering confrontation I emerge bloodied but victorious, leading the Redpill to the extraction point where I'm rewarded with experience points and a hearty slap on the back from



Well that's one way of saving yourself a trip to the dentist.

All that's missing are hundreds of Agent Smiths.



"Bugger, I've got my piercings caught. Hold on a sec."

Tyndall. Which is further than I expected to get with her in all honesty...

THE MATRIX RELOADED

Back at base, Ragaini is waiting to tell me more. "Narrative is very important to us. The Wachowskis brothers have a specific story in mind, and in many ways, *The Matrix Online* is a vehicle for the players to participate in that story," he begins. "We'll be releasing periodic updates to move the story along and add new content, but we're not committing to specific intervals. For one thing, we're still determining how frequently our live team can update the game, but we also don't want the player-base to have a predictable day when the story updates. Part of our story updates will include in-engine cinematics that relay important or world-shaping events to everyone. We'll be archiving these

cinematics so that later players can review what's happened and quickly get up to speed with the story."

As I retire to my soggy bunk to sleep off the exertions of my first day of freedom, I realise that I've just stamped my own personal influence on one of the most accomplished sci-fi universes ever created, in a MMOG that teems with possibilities and excitement, though still needs some serious work to iron out the niggles, glitches and bugs.

These aside though, *The Matrix Online* is shaping up to potentially be both thrilling and involving, and come the spring you may just find yourself mixing with The Oracle, Morpheus, The Merovingian and maybe even the Wachowskis themselves as you help write the future of the Matrix. Bet you're glad you took the red pill now, eh? Better than Nurofen any day... **MZ**



PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE



Step up to the plate and win, win, win!

ROUND FOUR has come and gone, and while the quality of competitive gaming on show was extremely high, it wasn't without a technical hitch or two. Our original plan to have games of *Quake III*, *Tribes Vengeance* and *Joint Operations: Escalation* were scuppered by a cock-up on the *Joint Ops* front. Thus we were left with only two of the three scheduled events running. Fear not though, a concerted push from the bods at Jolt managed to wipe out the gremlins and thanks to their technical wizardry, *Escalation* has been added to the list of games currently being played in round five. Along with 6v6 *Day Of Defeat*, 1v1 *Painkiller* and 4v4 *Half-Life 2 Team Deathmatch* games, it should be a round to remember.

Back to round four though, and once again Clan S? proved their chops by walking away with the *Quake III* CTF title (following a similar success in round one – they be beaten?). A moment of FA Cup third round-style giant killing almost occurred with unranked late entrants Neutralizers making it all the way to the semis, but experience won out in the end.

Meanwhile the ten-man team of Hindsight took the *Tribes Vengeance* honours, demolishing Team Knightwolf

in the semis and just managing to see off Novel in the finals. The full results are to the right, and congratulations to everyone who entered – we hope the next rounds prove to be as thrilling. As always, you can get full details of the matches over at www.pczone.jolt.co.uk.

To round six. You've just got time to jump into the mayhem running throughout February, with yet more 1v1 *Painkiller*, as well as 6v6 *Tactical Ops* and 10v10 *Battlefield Vietnam*. Plenty of slots still open so you should be able to get a shot at winning some of the fantastic prizes on offer thanks to our lovely sponsors. Remember, you've got to be in it to win it...



**SIGN UP AT
WWW.PCZONE.JOLT.CO.UK
TODAY!**



Painkiller deathmatch remains ever-popular.

Battlefield Vietnam returns for round six.

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES



The V9950 series from leading graphics card manufacturer Asus takes GeForce FX performance to a whole new level. www.asus.com



The XMS product line is Corsair's premium desktop product family and is the world's most highly awarded memory. www.corsairmemory.com



Creative's Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS sound cards and the Inspire T7700 speakers produce superior audio for gamers. www.creative.com



Logitech raises the bar in gaming precision and performance with the MX 510 mouse and Internet Navigator SE Keyboard. www.logitech.co.uk



A worldwide leader in the motherboard industry, MSI's K7N2 supports the latest AthlonXP and Duron processors. www.msicomputer.co.uk



Plantronics USB headset with DSP (digital signal processing) with maximum bass response – enhanced for gaming. www.plantronics.com



The WD Raptor is a new class of hard drive that matches SCSI reliability and performance. www.westerndigital.com



The home of online gaming, Jolt provides services from basic Quake clan ports to managed corporate game server solutions. www.jolt.co.uk

RESULTS

QUAKE 3 - CAPTURE THE FLAG 5V5

QUARTER-FINALS (MAP - Q3WCP22)

CLAN S?	3 - 2	ELAW
QUAKELAMERZ	1 - 3	NEUTRALIZERZ
JOBOS	2 - 1	SHEEPHEADS
SCARAB	6 - 0	TRES PUNTOS

SEMI-FINALS (MAP - Q3CTF2)

NEUTRALIZERZ	0 - 3	CLAN S?
JOBOS	2 - 0	SCARAB

FINAL (MAP - Q3WCP22)

CLAN S?	5 - 1	JOBOS
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WINNERS: CLAN S?

TRIBES VENGEANCE - TEAM DEATHMATCH 10V10

SEMI-FINALS (MAP - TROPICS, BEST OF THREE)

DRUNKEN OLD FARTS	0 - 20	NOVEL
DRUNKEN OLD FARTS	1 - 2	NOVEL

SEMI-FINALS (MAP - TROPICS, BEST OF THREE)

HINDSIGHT	19 - 1	KNIGHTWOLF
HINDSIGHT	16 - 1	KNIGHTWOLF

FINAL (MAP - EMERALD, BEST OF THREE)

NOVEL	6 - 8	HINDSIGHT
NOVEL	4 - 12	HINDSIGHT

WINNERS: Hindsight



Some blurry-looking winners of last year's WEG event.

E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk - **Philip Wride**

With Christmas and New Year come and gone, it's time to take a look at this year's CPL Winter and related news. Firstly there was only one British team in attendance at the CPL, 4Kings, due to an unfortunate series of events surrounding rivals TAG.

TAG's main sponsor AMD suddenly withdrew from contract negotiations regarding a second year of support, leaving TAG high and dry and unable to attend CPL Winter. This was a bitter blow to the team, who after their great performance at CPL Summer 2004, have shown they can compete with some of the best. Instead, international team NoA were crowned champs at the event, but in

all fairness to them, their win was a decisive one. They managed to beat Swedish outfit EYE twice in the final, claiming victory easily and pocketing the winner's cheque. 4Kings only managed to place 13th, disappointing in their eyes but still a reasonable performance overall.

This month's big news has been the resurrection of one of Counter-Strike's most infamous teams, NIP. The players that form the new line-up for this legendary team all come from the recent SK.Swe team, some of whom were in the original NIP team. After another set of contract negotiations broke down the players decided to leave the SK-Gaming organisation, considered to be the best in

the world, and headed out into no-man's-land to battle it out on their own. The news certainly turned a few heads, and a lot of people can't wait to see whether we will have any matches as exciting as the NIP vs. X3 game – it happened at CPL years ago, but it's legendary.

There is hope on the horizon for British teams though, in the form of the World Esport Games League in Korea. This is an invitation-only event for both Counter-Strike and Warcraft 3, and is gathering some of the best teams from around the world. The teams and players will live in Korea for six weeks and will play for some serious cash prizes. 4Kings are one of the teams fortunate enough to be invited along, with several of their Warcraft 3 players. Time will tell as to how they perform, but we'll have an update on their progress next month, so stay tuned and wish them luck.



The 4Kings clan keeps the British end up at CPL Winter.



EverQuest II this most certainly isn't.



"Which way's Norrath?"

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

£34.99 (+£8.99 monthly subscription, first month free) | Pub: VU Games |
Dev: Blizzard | ETA: Out Now | www.worldofwarcraft.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a 56K modem

DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 1024MB RAM, 256MB 3D card and a broadband or cable Internet connection

It would seem that the MMORPG king has been crowned, but Rhianna Pratchett is about to lead the anti-monarchs into battle

THERE'S nothing more dangerous than peaceful woodlands. They lull you into a false sense of security. It can be so easy to just wander along without a care in the world. Then, just when you're stopping to admire the sunset, a giant Taurean warrior rises up behind you, steam billowing off its shaggy hide and nostrils flaring like the gates of hell itself.

You could try and make a break for it. You could run,

maybe try to get to Alliance territory and seek help. But by the looks of that wickedly sharp axe he's toting, you wouldn't get far. Especially without a head. Besides, the weapon is already arcing its way down, preparing to cleave through muscle and sinew as if they were water. You don't stand a chance really, and before long you're looking at the sky wondering why you never saw it coming.

When you enter the spirit-world of lights and shadows, you immediately head for the site of your recent demise, your ghostly form gliding across the ethereal

waiting for you to resurrect so he can begin again. Dirty... Rotten... Camper!

But he's made one error in judgement. His back is to you

stealth yourself, sinking back into the foliage to gain your strength and chuck a few potions down your throat. And then you wait.

"You stand over his corpse, gloating over your sweet victory. Perhaps you might stick around"

landscape. When you reach your prone, lifeless body, you see that the Taurean is still standing nearby. Waiting, just waiting;

and you never, ever, turn your back on a rogue, even if it's dead. You resurrect close by to some bushes and immediately

With your daggers at the ready – twin harbingers of sharp and pointy death – you sneak up behind the warrior and execute



See, not all monkeys are funny.



IN PERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST II

Reviewed Issue 150, Score 95%
The other MMOG of choice. Less cartoony in style than WoW and lacking in any PvP whatsoever (not that there was ever meant to be any), this is still about as good as it gets for MMOGs. Unless you prefer WoW of course.

FINAL FANTASY XI

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 81%
A rather more insular game than both WoW and EQII, but it certainly gives you enough story-driven quests and pretty things to look at to keep you interested. The control system is a pain in the arse though.



Sure, the tiger looks good, but the horse gives you better miles per gallon.



Bloody snow.

lethal ambush manoeuvre, driving your daggers through his skin and deep, deep into the flesh beneath.

You're visible to the Taurean now, but that won't do him much good. You dance around him, daggers flashing, repeatedly hitting him with your sinister strike and gouging the bovine meat from his bones. You barely notice his axe blows as you hit him with your last and final move, Eviscerate; the roguish kiss of death. He slumps to the ground, and his nostrils flare for the last time. Cow pie all round! You stand over his corpse, gloating over your sweet victory. Perhaps you might just stick around.

ALL ABOARD

And it happened just like that. Honest. Along with thousands of other battles aboard the good ship *World Of Warcraft* as it makes the franchise transition from the

relatively calm waters of strategy gaming into the big bad seas of MMORPGs.

It's certainly been a long voyage. *Warcraft* itself is ten years old. Can you really believe it's been ten years since we first heard "Oooohkay Den" from the mouths of pixelated orcish peons? But make no mistake – Blizzard is not taking any chances with its great white hope that's sprung forth from the bastard love child of *Dune 2* addicts and overactive GMers.

DEATH BECOMES HER

THE REAPER AIN'T SO GRIM

WOW certainly has one of the most lenient death penalty systems. Rather than losing experience points, you get the option of ghosting it to your corpse and losing nothing or resurrecting at a nearby graveyard. The second option comes with an item deterioration penalty and resurrection sickness which severely knocks down your stats for anything up to and over ten minutes, depending on your level. Since it's pretty easy to die, especially during low-to-middle levels, a gentler system seems appropriate. Besides, being effectively consigned to the sidelines for ten minutes is annoying enough, without knowing you're going to have to kill a small army of monsters just to get your XP back.



This fine lady will resurrect you.

"Oooohkay Den" to anybody.

Although I've played on both the Player vs Player and Player vs Environment servers, I'll be referencing the former a lot more than the latter. This is because for one, the Horde vs Alliance battle is something intrinsic to

the *Warcraft* universe – and also because it's a feature that *EverQuest II* doesn't offer.

So on that note, perhaps the first minor disappointment you're going to find with *WOW* is you can't play both sides of the fence. You're limited to one character per

ALL ABOARD

If you're reading this, chances are you have a fair idea of the origins of *Warcraft* and the ancient battle between the Alliance and the Horde. If not, then stop right now and go and get yourself the last three games. You won't regret it. In essence, *World Of Warcraft* represents the very literal translation of this world into a 3D environment. Only this time, you're the peon and you won't be saying



**Tattooine, anyone?**

server, meaning it's Alliance or Horde, but not both. Daddy or chips.

What more than makes up for this though, is that Blizzard has made sure that the eight races in the game (Human, Night Elf, Gnome, Dwarf, Undead, Taurean, Troll and Orc) and their available classes do play noticeably differently. Using the brute strength of an orc warrior and playing a rogue night elf that fights by harnessing a series of combo moves are worlds apart. Likewise, learning to play with a pet by your side as a hunter or warlock is an art in itself.

Each race also comes with its own innate traits. Gnomes have an intellect bonus, while night elves turn into wisps when they die, allowing them to move 50 per cent faster. So even if you're going to have to make that

**This'll get ugly.**

'daddy or chips' decision, there's definitely a lot to love whichever side you opt for.

EASY LIFE

So your first experiences of WOW are about firm choices. But once you've selected your race and profession, Blizzard has limited the number of times you have to make decisions that you can't go back on. Yes, there is a certain amount of choice

when it comes to the skills you can buy from the relevant class trainers, but given enough coin you can buy everything if you want to. Even your talents, the skill-tree-based class abilities, can be rearranged if you're not happy with them.

There's no statistic-juggling in WOW either, so when you level up, all those annoying 'now do I put two in strength and one in agility or...' thoughts are taken

MISSSED OPPORTUNITY (O)

**One way to beat the traffic jams.**

NO AIRBORNE ANTICS FOR YOU!

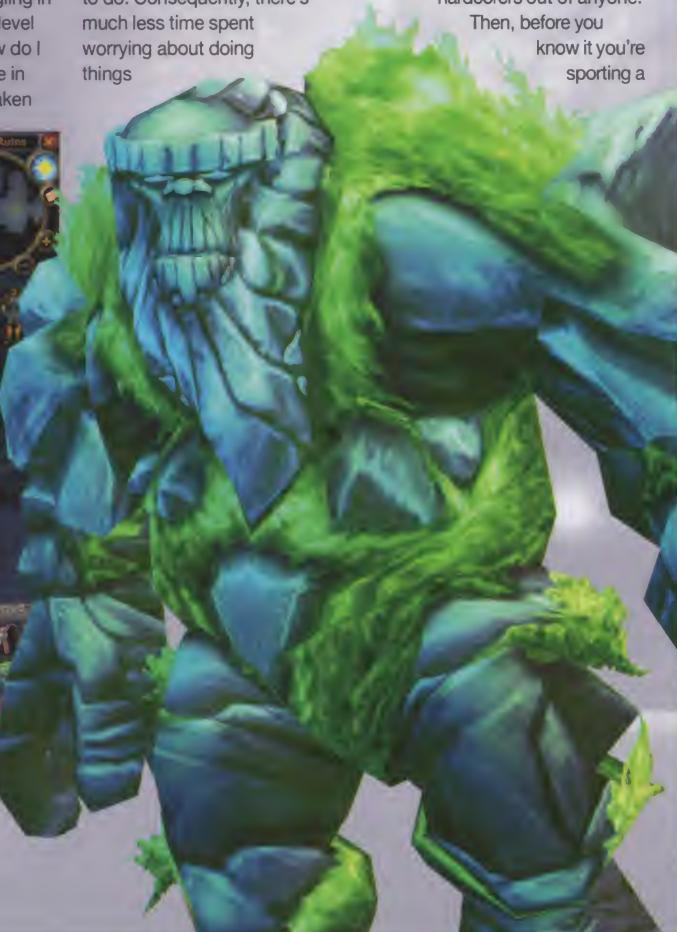
OK so it's a very small thing, but one of the things I loved about Shadowbane was the fact that some characters had the ability to fly and attack while in flight. You can fly through the air in WOW on gryphons and the like, but you can't actually take to the skies yourself, which seems like an obvious thing to do when you've specifically designed your game to be seen from above as well as on the ground. However, the developer has got so much right that I'm fully prepared to wait a little while longer for my first take-off.

care of for you. And you know what? You really don't miss it.

For this reason, WOW is likely to attract a large number of new MMORPG players, something Blizzard has always been keen to do. Consequently, there's much less time spent worrying about doing things

right and more time spent enjoying yourself. This is aided further with an easy-to-use interface and fight system. And because the game is so accessible, it can really make hardcores out of anyone.

Then, before you know it you're sporting a

**As you can see, it's not called 'Warcraft' because it's light and fluffy.**



Rain's a bit heavy in these parts.

guild tabard and making jokes about the sex lives of gnomes.

Sliding neatly in beside your main class abilities are hands-on professions, including things like blacksmithing, mining, enchanting and leatherwork. You can only adopt two at a time, but like many things in *WOW*, it's possible to change them.

These work brilliantly on a number of levels. First, because

the majority of professions are useful straight away, they can greatly aid the development of your character. They're also important in creating strong guilds or aiding your party. Lastly, they're essential for bringing in the money, and believe me that's something you need a lot of. So suddenly, your character is more than the sum of their hit-points and the game

isn't just about the relentless pursuit of the kill. It's not what you've got it's what you do with it that counts.

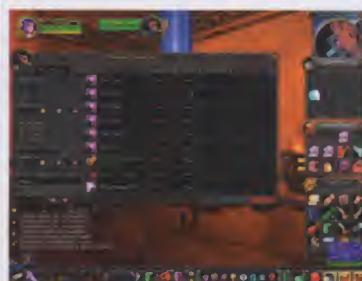
WAR IS GLORIOUS

Personally, I feel that Blizzard's use of PvP is going to be the defining factor if you're making a choice between *WOW* and *EQII*. It's so cleverly designed that the Horde vs Alliance war isn't all-

destroying or detrimental to the gameplay if you're after an easy life. In fact, there are even some towns in *WOW* where Horde and Alliance co-exist in an uneasy peace. Still, there's really no feeling like gathering up a posse to raid an enemy territory, then legging it back to town because you've got to defend your homelands, or even a one-to-one face-off.

PvP also makes for an interesting microcosm of human behaviour, a window on your virtual soul. You get to see what you're really like. Will you, as a member of the Alliance, kill a Horde as soon as look at them? Or will you pass on by or help them out? Are you going to walk round the corner and be faced by an enemy who'll stab you in the back while you're fighting, or one who'll attempt an emoticon flirtation session boarding on Victorian levels of coquettishness? You never

WOWBAY



YOU'VE GOT MAIL

One of the most innovative features of *WOW*, and one which works so well you wonder why it hasn't become a MMORPG standard long ago, is the in-game postal and auction systems. Not only can you post money and items to other characters, but when you buy and sell items through the game's auction houses, the transactions are automatically done through the postal service. If you're outbid you get your money back, if you win then the item is sent to you and the same goes for any profit you make. Plus, you also get in-game alerts about the progress of your auctions. Simple, but it works like a dream.

SECOND OPINION

DAVE WOODS

You wouldn't normally find me in a MMOG review. I've shunned them from the off, refusing to get drawn into a virtual world when I barely have enough time to pay my bills in the real one. But then I cracked, installed *WOW*, and spent the next 20-30 hours of my PC time lost in a paladin's body, flying griffins, learning to fish and only getting told to f*** off by one particularly rude group of MMOG-ers. Apparently I stole their quest. And there was me thinking the quests in *WOW* were for everyone.

I managed to get out again, and haven't been back in since, but despite this not being my favoured genre of choice, I can confidently say that *WOW* is as big a hook for first-timers as it is for wizened young crones like Rhianna. The one criticism I've got is that the quests can get extremely repetitive (kill five of those, ten of those, now kill 15 of these etc), but somehow it doesn't seem to matter. As long as I get my new hammer that kills things twice as fast as my last one. Is it too addictive? Are these games irresponsible, by constantly offering more and more, for weeks and weeks of play? Only you know the answer to that.

know just quite what to expect.

Blizzard has done what every MMORPG should be trying to do – it's ticked all the right boxes and really tried to forge the link between the heart and the head in a hugely immersive virtual space. This is what creates the stories in your imagination. These aren't just battles, they're adventures. Now that's what role-playing should be all about. The battle lines are firmly drawn with *EverQuest II* – now it's up to you to fight the war.

PCZONE VERDICT

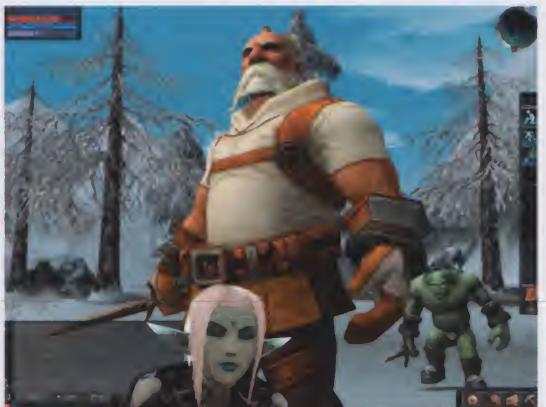
- ✓ Wonderful design throughout
- ✓ Great sense of atmosphere
- ✓ Easily accessible by all
- ✓ Tremendous fun
- ✗ Can't play as both Horde and Alliance on PvP servers
- ✗ Bye bye life

95

This is the future



That's one flag that's been well and truly captured.



Nice outfit, but I bet it isn't machine-washable.

LINEAGE II

£29.99 (one month free – monthly subscription £8.99) | Pub: NCsoft | Dev: NCsoft | ETA: Out Now | www.lineage2.com

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a cable or broadband Internet connection **DESIRE** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a cable or broadband Internet connection

It's time that lazy Richie Shoemaker was offered a real online challenge

SEVERAL months after its initial release, apart from being a good deal more attractive on the eye, the word on the street is that *EverQuest II* offers much the same sort of experience as the original game. Whatever the truth in these often-misinformed summations (I've barely played it myself), this may not be a bad thing. However, having played *Lineage II*, I can categorically state that apart from being a good deal more attractive, *Lineage II* probably has more of the original *EverQuest* about it than the official sequel, and not in a good way either.

Much like every fantasy online role-playing game that's ever existed, *Lineage II* offers up the usual mix of fantasy mannequins (humans, dwarves,

orcs and elves), on which you must hang a soul and strive to make a name for yourself in a vast world populated by like-minded others. As befits the genre, the means without end requires you to earn coin and experience points until you can take no more and cancel your subscription, hopefully before which time you'll have met other like-minded individuals and forged a friendship that the developer hopes will stave off the inevitable.

If this sounds rather negative, then that was my intention. This is because *Lineage II* has clearly been designed to appeal to the

hardcore online role-player, the 'power gamer' if you will, and being a rather sedate fellow who likes to amble through life (whether online or off), I find the whole process rather dull and transparent. I've been here before and should I wish to do it again, I'd rather return to old haunts. Even if *Lineage* was my first MMO, I'd much rather cut my teeth elsewhere.

DO THE GRIND

The problem with *Lineage II* is that it takes the process of grinding your way through the levels beyond what any reasonable human can take.

Killing rodents, wolves, goblins and hybrids thereof is all very well, but at least make it interesting. I mean, clicking on an AI monster and then simply watching a series of blows play themselves out is not what I call exciting gameplay. To do this for two solid weeks in the hope of picking up some coin or special item along the way until some online guild will even look at you is just an exercise in tedium, the like of which I've rarely experienced before.

To make matters worse, loot drops are rare and the cost of equipment is way too expensive. After ten hours of incessant wolf-

twatting, I was still mincing around in my n00b threads swinging the same piece of bulbous wood I was issued with at the start. I tried alleviating the drudgery by trying to converse with those around me, but sadly half of them were incomunicado (afk, running bots and 'farming'). And of those who did respond to my hails, many would rather commit assault than commit to helping me. Not that I'm against unfettered PvP, but for the high-level player-killers, the rewards for unprovoked assault far outweigh the costs. Mind you, after reaching level 40, I'm not



Someone needs a manicure.



"What do you mean the '80s revival is over?"

IN PERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST II

Reviewed Issue 150, Score 95%
The best of the best. This is how you make a good-looking MMOG that actually plays well and has plenty of long-term depth...

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 95%
...And so is this. Except here, it's a cartoon style and has the PvP options that *Lineage II* boasts, only much, much better.

"After reaching level 40, I'm not surprised half the player-base are mildly psychotic"



Richie on one of his better days.



Cooeee! He's behind you!

surprised half the player-base are mildly psychotic.

Graphically, *Lineage II* is an impressive game. The characters and animation are fluid and detailed, more so as you sheepishly move away from the villages haunted by the inexperienced to meet the more exclusive creatures that inhabit the rural locales. Weapon and spell effects are colourful and the landscape, though perhaps lacking in the kind of detail one might expect from Unreal technology, is vast and varied – certainly bigger than any MMO real estate I've seen. If you like exploring, *Lineage II* has many places worth visiting.

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Of course, much like any online game, *Lineage II* is only as good as the people that play it – and should you cross paths with an honourable troupe of mystics and warriors, you're sure to have the time of your life. Large guild structures are actively encouraged to the point where the game's latter rewards rotate solely around clan warfare with regular castle sieges, gifting the victor with the ability to set their own fiscal agenda. These battles, often featuring hundreds of players, clearly have appeal.

However, the fact is that after witnessing a couple of them, I'd much rather load up *UT2004* and play an Assault map – the objectives are essentially the same, at least some skill is required and you don't have to spend days of your life killing fury mammals to earn the right to take part.

HARD DAY'S KNIGHT

Lineage II clearly has much to offer the dedicated online role-player, with massive pitched battles, pets to train and raise, and even a mighty impressive dragon to slay (for characters level 50 or above). By allowing players to prey on each other without much constraint – despite the obvious frustration that often results – PvP does add a real edge of excitement where most fantasy games feel far too overbearing and sterile.

Having said that, unless you're prepared to make *Lineage II* your one and only online game and devote as much time as it takes to get through those first few days and weeks, it's probably not worth bothering with. The way I see it, the only reason you might want to carry on playing is because you've

already invested so much time in getting to where you are – which sounds like a lot of hard work to me. But if that sounds like manna from heaven to you, knock yourself out. **PC**



"Until you learn some control, the nappy stays."

IS THIS THE AGE OF SPLENDOUR?

FREE LINEAGE II ADD-ON, AVAILABLE... WELL, RIGHT ABOUT NOW

By the time you read this, *Chronicle 2: The Age Of Splendour* will have been released, a second free expansion that introduces all sorts of new areas to explore, skills to train, items to find and monsters to slay. Fortunately, a lot of the incoming features look like they'll benefit the new as well as the established players, with a varied new set of NPC missions and some mini-games. These include a lottery, a dice game, monster racing, a gladiatorial coliseum and Broadcast Towers, where Joe Public can sit and watch castle sieges without fear of being prodded with sharp metal implements. Whether there'll be enough in store to liven up the early stages of the game is yet to be seen, but if you're already making headway into the game, *The Age Of Splendour* can only be a good thing.



He'll have an eye out if he's not careful.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Impressive visuals
- ✓ Branching skill tree
- ✓ PvP and large-scale combat
- ✗ Takes too long to get anywhere
- ✗ Tedious and repetitive early stages
- ✗ Not much depth

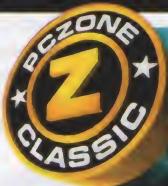
61

Starts well, fades fast



Access to Deadspace is made via Acceleration Gates.

EVE ONLINE: EXODUS



■ £13.79 (one month free – monthly subscription from £7.57) |
Pub: CCP | Dev: CCP | ETA: Out Now | www.eve-online.com

REQUIRES PIII 600MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB DirectX9.0-compatible 3D card and 56k modem

DESIRABLES P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB DirectX9.0-compatible 3D card and cable or broadband connection

As Hebrews a cup of tea, Richie Shoemaker takes a fresh Luke at the online sci-fi game that's been a Revelation...

INPERSPECTIVE

STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED

Reviewed Issue 151, Score 71%
Yes we all loved Star Wars, especially the ships. *Lightspeed* offers an authentic space combat thrill, but the excitement is too long in arriving and too short in duration.

NEXUS: THE

JUPITER INCIDENT

Reviewed Issue 149, Score 81%
A single-player game and a very good one where you equip your ship with weapons and control it via a *Homeworld*-style interface... Much like in *EVE*.

EVE ONLINE has been live for 20 months now, so territorial claims and fleet battles are nothing new. However, despite not offering new civilisations or solar systems to explore, *Exodus* is a significant expansion that builds upon the solid foundations of the original game.

For starters, Alliances are now formalised structures that can lay official claim to sectors of space, and battles are far more manageable thanks to a zoomed-out Tactical Overlay that helps you judge the speed

and direction of enemy vessels, as well as your own.

Moreover, the graphics have been improved no end, with populated planets that show signs of life as opposed to appearing barren, ships now explode rather than 'pop' and drones lurch about with menacing elegance rather than swimming like confused minnows. In short, the game looks even more stunning that it did before, the client code runs like a dream and developer CCP has been constantly updating servers in the quest to both



Player stations at last!

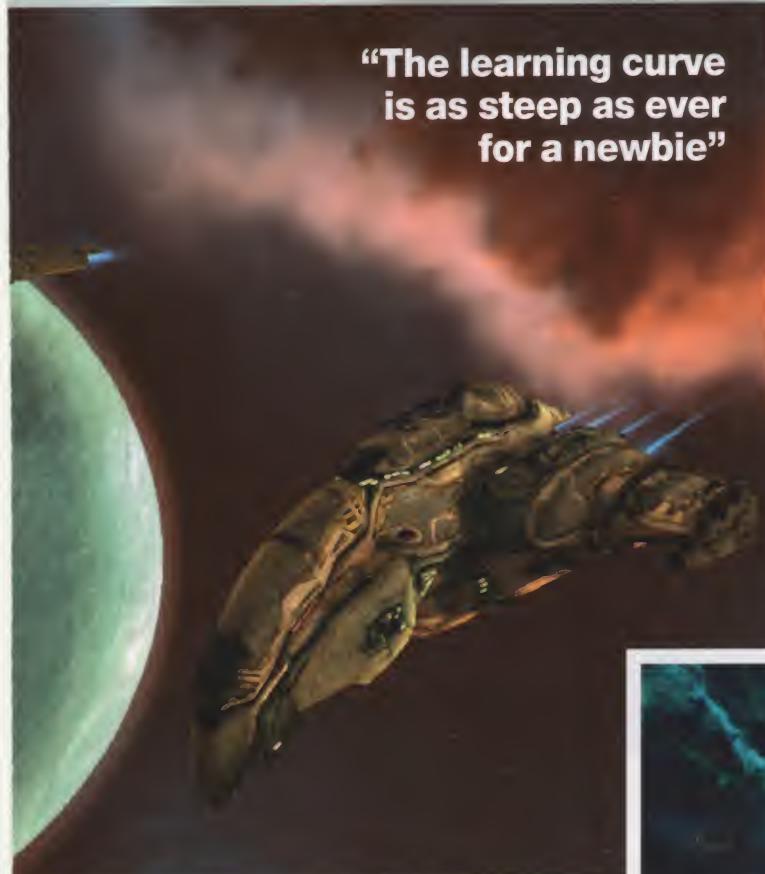
eliminate lag and ensure that if you're playing on a 56k modem, you still have an enjoyable time.

THE PROMISED LAND

There's literally a ton of new content too. Battlecruisers have been introduced to bridge the gap between cruisers and battleships, while sleek Destroyers are now available, which should provide an effective deterrent against pirate interceptors and frigates. Plus, if you like to sit among asteroids and



"The learning curve is as steep as ever for a newbie"



A Destroyer and a Battlecruiser fly side by side. Bless.



There's nothing like being in a gang of ships and warping to your prey together.



Holy smoke!



Trading is now a viable career - with calculator!



The mining barge can make you a small fortune in minerals.

read a book while filling up your cargo hold with minerals, there are the new mining barges, a fleet of which can strip away a rock field in a few hours.

However, the biggest introduction are player-owned structures (POS) – deep-space mining installations that can be set up around certain mineral-rich moons by player-corporations, and then left to slowly suck away lucrative minerals. With enough money and pilots, you can fill up a small fleet of industrial ships with the required self-assembly packs, fly out into the back of beyond (taking care not to wander into any systems currently under dispute) and erect yourself a complex of harvesting arrays, silos, refineries, reactors, ship

maintenance pods and all the required defence structures needed to keep pirates and trespassers at bay.

HERE TO HELP

With all this talk of such high-level pursuits as fleet battles and deep-space mining, you may well be wondering what there is to look forward to if you're new to *Exodus*. It's true that the learning curve is as steep as ever for a newbie, and the first few hours will likely bewilder and confuse in equal measure, as you get to grips with the sheer vastness of the universe, the economy and using your ship and its modules.

Thankfully though, finding help isn't as much of a problem as it used to be. Just ask a question in your Corp chat window, and more often than not a friend will come to your aid. It's

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

WHEN THE PLAYERS OF EVE GO TO WAR, THE WHOLE COMMUNITY KNOWS ABOUT IT...

Every night of the week 10,000 people from across the world play *EVE Online*. Except on Sundays, when that number exceeds 12,000. Not a lot of people compared to the numbers that occupy their time with *EverQuest* or *World Of Warcraft*, but when you consider that in *EVE* everyone is part of the same evolving universe rather than forced to play across 'shards' that typically host no more than 2,500 people at a time, you soon appreciate just how unique *EVE Online* truly is.

By way of example, there's a formal alliance of player-run Corporations that has close to 4,000 ship commanders among its ranks, one so bold as to claim a portion of deep space as its own. Other alliances have made similar territorial claims and borders are patrolled with varying regularity. Needless to say, claims are often



Tactical view is a godsend in large battles.

contested, pirate gangs turn up and fleets in their hundreds engage on a daily basis. Out there, somewhere, billions upon billions of kilometres away from the relative safety that 'Empire space' provides, thousands live and die with disquieting regularity.

also worth mentioning that at long last, a full player manual has been created, which is worth scanning through before you commit to a subscription. If you want to know more, go to www.eve-online.com/guide.

What's more, there are now hidden areas where you can gang up on NPC pirates – and these are for players of all levels. These Deadspace Complexes, situated in various parts of the galaxy enable players to club together for short missions – previously, unless you were going to play for at least two hours, it's

was hardly worth logging on.

So, if you've not tried *EVE* before and have a love of rich science fiction, stylish graphics and are prepared to have your mind stretched a bit (along with, occasionally, your patience), then *Exodus* may well be the game for you. There really isn't anything quite like it, simply because for all their self-congratulatory remarks about pulling in an obscene number of punters, no other online world is as large, as fully populated, or, as a consequence, quite so rich with opportunity.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ 10,000+ people playing on one server
- ✓ New ships complement the old
- ✓ Better graphics, faster code
- ✓ A manual, at last!
- ✗ Lots to learn
- ✗ Slow-paced

91

Stylish, beautiful and endlessly dynamic

UTXMP PUBLIC BETA

ON THE DVD SIZE 275MB REQUIRES Full version of UT2004
www.free-monkey.com

Tony Lamb gets extended...

UTXMP – Unreal Tournament Extended Multiplayer – is a cracking new mod from Free Monkey Interactive that offers plenty of scrapping, tactical gameplay and good old-fashioned fun. Its roots can be traced back to the sadly deceased *Extended Multiplayer* add-on for *Unreal II*, which first combined class-based deathmatch with impressive vehicles and automated defences. *UTXMP* has built on this to bring an exciting and action-packed feel to *UT2004*.

The premise of *UTXMP* is similar to Capture the Flag, except that here each team has two artefacts, both of which have to be pinched by the opposition. If your team gets all four artefacts, you win, but it isn't going to be easy. This is because *UTXMP* adds kick-ass vehicles, along with treats like trip mines, deployable sentry turrets, portable force-fields and more.



"Christ, it's hot in this get-up!"

You can also capture deployment points nearer to the enemy base for faster reinforcement, and even take control of many in-game objects to benefit your team. Rocket jump-packs add a welcome boost, and you can revive wounded team-mates too.

UTXMP gets a definite thumbs-up. There are a couple of glitches, but these are insignificant when you consider

the overall quality. With its varied and well-designed maps, great vehicles, challenging gameplay and host of other novel features, this mod deserves to do well. Even the online manual scores top marks.

PCZONE VERDICT

86

A superb newcomer



Thank god for four-wheel drive.



"Blue is the colour, killing is the game..."



No recycling of elephants? Tsk.



Ghosts in the machine.

NEOTOKYO

ON THE DVD SIZE 232MB REQUIRES Full version of UT2004
www.neotokyohq.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb's turning Japanese, he really thinks so...

ONE DAY, someone will create a futuristic mod in which everyone is happy. Life is valued, petrol is cheap, game reviewers have harems and everyone loves everyone else. This isn't it though. Instead, *NeoTokyo* – based on a range of popular sci-fi anime stories – is set barely 30 years into the future when the

gap between rich and poor has widened and the government uses an iron fist to keep the masses under control.

This is the premise for a class-based team deathmatch with a twist. Anime is a genre rarely focused on in modding circles, but *NeoTokyo* could change that – despite its flaws, it looks great. The maps are generally top notch, reflecting an urban environment with a fine attention to detail. So many

urban maps are dark, dingy places, but *NT*'s are bright and realistic with a definite oriental flavour. Character skins are likewise top class, as are the weapons and effects. The gameplay is relatively simple too – seize and hold the capture points before wiping out the opposition to win the match – but fun-packed nonetheless.

NeoTokyo is hampered by its lack of bot support and while there are a few servers, they're sparsely populated, which makes LAN-play the best bet. This is a shame, because the maps are up there with the best, but maybe things will change if the touted Source Engine version comes to fruition.



What, no Bolton?

PCZONE VERDICT

71

Looks great, but needs bots and support

DAWN OF WAR

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Relic | ETA: Out Now |

www.dawnofwargame.com | No players: 2-8

REQUIRES PIII 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESires P4 2.2 GHz, 512MB RAM, a 64MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

MULTIPLAYER

Multiplayer deadline dawns on Steve Randall

Apart from

the graphics, strategy games haven't changed much since *Total Annihilation* – and *Dawn Of War* is no exception. People tend to play most strategy games the same way – they either 'rush' within minutes of the game starting, or they employ an out-and-out defensive stance by building a massive army and trying to overwhelm the enemy with sheer weight of numbers.

Dawn Of War features one of the best match-up systems I've had the pleasure of using. Once registered, everyone starts with a score of 1,000, which changes according to your wins or losses. With a simple auto-match, the game finds another player of a similar

ability to you and away you go. Should you be choosier about whose axe you want to whip though, you'll be pleased to know you can be more selective if you want to be.

Another bonus is that you can record each match and watch it from any side, and so learn by your mistakes or your opponent's expertise. In this way, you can develop and learn the techniques to overcome the constant 'scissors, paper, stone' battle that strategy games offer.

Thankfully, any beatings you take are soon over, as online, the game is fast and furious. Once you've mastered the art of how to overcome various attacks, you can

have a decent match. However, nine times out of ten the winner of the first main attack goes on to win the war, although the game does provide for some great strategic comebacks if your opponent ceases to concentrate for a few seconds.

All said and done, *Dawn Of War* should appeal if you're a tabletop fan of *Warhammer* and already familiar with the units' strengths and weaknesses. And if you're new to it or are attached to your current favourite strategy game, this might be a welcome change of pace for a while before reverting to your old familiar.



Better than rolling dice.



Orcs – a Warhammer perennial.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

MULTIPLAYER

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: The Creative Assembly | ETA: Out Now | www.totalwar.com | No players: 2-8

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 56K Internet connection DESires P4 2.5GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a 2MB broadband connection

Martin Korda wages total war online. He's hard like that...



Who needs Time Commanders?



You back up. We were here first.



The 3.50 handicap at Ascot gets waylaid.



FOR QUITE a few years now, the *Total War* games have been the undisputed kings of strategy gaming, leagues ahead of their opponents in most departments – except one. Online multiplayer games. Part of the reason for this is that many Internet connections simply can't handle the games' enormous battles, but with broadband getting faster (and cheaper), that's slowly changing.

As a result, *Rome* is the first *Total War* game to be truly accessible to the online masses.

Before you start though, go to www.totalwar.com and get the latest patch, after which you can trawl through the extensive list of servers (usually populated by Germans or Americans, depending on what time it is) and contest anything from a 1v1 to a 4v4 – or 8-player all versus all, Last Man Standing, Scored

Resolution or Historical battles.

However, while *Rome*'s online games are certainly a massive improvement over *Medieval*'s, it still isn't the finished online product. On anything under a 1MB pipe, the larger-scale battles sometimes chug like a rusty steam train, while the mesmerising visuals of the single-player game are often automatically toned down to allow for smoother gameplay.

You also rarely feel as though you have the same kind of control over your troops – especially during larger skirmishes – as you do in single-player games, and this shortfall cheapens the experience slightly. Plus, the new patch seems to have dumbed-down cavalry slightly too much and makes archers and even some pikemen run way too fast.

Despite a few quirks though,

Rome is still the most entertaining online *Total War* game yet and an enthralling experience in its own right – one that extends the game's already gargantuan replayability value yet further.

PCZONE VERDICT

SINGLE-PLAYER SCORE **93**

MULTIPLAYER SCORE **80**

COMMUNITY CHEST

TOTAL WAR SERIES



The *Total War* modding community have been busy boys. Daniel Emery puts eight of the best additions through their paces...

From *Shogun* to *Rome*, the *Total War* series redefines the real-time strategy genre. From the stunning 3D real-time battles, with unit numbers measured in thousands, through to the strategic element of building cities and moving armies, the series has widespread appeal and has sold by the bucketload. It also spawned a massive online community, which is well supported by developer Creative Assembly. If only all software houses were like this. Here's eight of the best community offerings...



CAS EDITOR PLUGIN (RTW: UTILITY)

www.stratcommandcenter.com/vercing/cas_editor.php

This plug-in for 3DS Max enables you to edit the CAS files in *Total War*. Put simply, this means you can edit the geometry and entire make-up of the units and buildings in the game. Essential if you fancy designing a total conversion from scratch or just want to polish a few elephants.



A WORLD DIVIDED V3.0 (MTW: ADD-ON)

www.kekvitirae.com

World Divided addresses a host of niggling play issues, along with balancing out numerous units and factions. There's also the addition of pike-men to the Scottish faction, which proves *Braveheart's* influence – shame the film got it wrong in the first place.



THE LORDZ MODDING COLLECTIVE (MTW: TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.thelordz.co.uk

This excellent TC puts the clock forward a few hundred years to the Napoleonic era. All original *M:TW* graphics are redone to create musket-firing infantry, sweeping cavalry charges and blazing artillery batteries in battle. The team is working on an equivalent mod for *Rome* too. Huzzah!



ROME TOTAL REALISM (RTW: MOD)

www.rometotalrealism.com

The idea behind this mod was to make the game as historically accurate as possible. The designers have reworked everything from redesigning the provinces and settlements thorough to totally overhauling the economic model. Heck, they've even renamed all the factions to correctly fit the time period.



HELLENIC TOTAL WAR (MTW: TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.hellenictotalwar.com

If Napoleon doesn't rock your boat, then you might want to try your hand controlling one of the 14 Greek factions who were slugging it out forming the Greek city-states in 750BC, through the Greek struggle against the Persian Empire and the rise of Alexander the Great around 325BC.



ROME: TOTAL WAR HEAVEN (RTW: EVERYTHING)

rtw.heavengames.com

It may not be the best-looking site we've ever seen, but it's jam-packed with *Rome: Total War* goodness. With a download like Ninja Cool's excellent Historic Battles 2.5, an active community BBS and even a rough strategy guide, if you're new to the game this is a great place to start.

CHINA: TOTAL WAR TSIN EMPIRE INVASION (RTW: ADD ON)

www.stratcommandcenter.com/chinamod

Not a total conversion in the true sense, *China: Total War* adds 23 new units, a full Tsin Empire Army and adds a new twist to the *Rome* campaign. If you aren't a scholar of ancient history (like us), the Tsin empire is now modern-day Mongolia.



TOTAL WAR ORG (TOURNAMENTS)

www.totalwar.org

If you're bored of single-player or fancy a tougher challenge, then going up against human opponents could be just what the doctor ordered. On this site, you can enter leagues, join other clans or get your arse spanked by some little Herbert called Brian from Doncaster with an unhealthy militaristic fetish.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill works like an Egyptian in A Tale In The Desert

"WHO DO I need to f**k to get off of this godforsaken island?"

It's a fair question, and one that elicits the obligatory 'LOL' response from the passing Mark. He may be laughing out loud, but I'm crying inside. I've been here a week, and I'm beginning to freak; trapped on a barren rock, forced to toil the land like a filthy peasant. Said island is the gateway to Egypt, wherein lies the promise of riches beyond the wildest dreams of a lowly shit-shifter. Trouble is, being an island and all, it's surrounded by water, and like Alcatraz, the only way off is by boat.

"What do you still need to build your ferry?" inquires the helpful Mark.

Considering that I'm currently in possession of three bits of wood, a bucket of mud, some sand and eight pieces of straw, I reply: "Almost everything, I think."

I'm not wrong. Turns out I need 20 wood, 20 boards, 4 tar, 4 rope and 1 linen. It's a fairly

straightforward shopping list (for a serial killer), but unfortunately there's no B&Q on the island. Collecting the wood is easy enough, as it can simply be plucked off the trees. Planing it into boards is somewhat more problematic though, in so much as you have to first build a plane, using the bricks that you've made from mud, sand and straw (that you've made by drying the grass that you've picked), then forge a blade from slate, and so on. Suffice to say that for every action, there's a hateful chain of requirements, most of which involve growing flax (which has to be rotted, separated in a flax comb, spun in a distaff and then weaved in a loom). Simple eh?

HI-DE-HI

Not to worry, mentor Mark is here, and today he's going to teach us how to grow flax. Like an over-friendly rep on a shit holiday, he gathers the island's handful of inhabitants together and cheerily announces: "This

will be a comprehensive, step-by-step account of how to mass-produce flax." It's hardly a swingers party, but this is as good as it gets, and the easily-pleased Kaotika pipes up: "Ooh flaxing lessons. Fantastic!"

As the willing campers obediently assemble, I sulkily loiter on the periphery, only to be told: "Hillick, could you come join the others over here otherwise I'm gonna bury you in flax."

"Sir, yes sir," I sarcastically reply, but despite my reticence I do actually learn something, and head back to my humble camp with renewed vigour.

Efficient flax processing may be a useful skill, but it doesn't keep you warm at night. The farmer needs a wife. Scantily-clad Lyne ambles by, but my opening gambit of 'get off my land' fails to persuade her to hang around.

DEMON SEED

The next smell of female comes in the form of dyslexic's nightmare, Vallaara. Essentially

a pastier, thinner version of Xena: Warrior Princess, she casually helps herself to my discarded seed.

"Did you just take my seed?" I challenge her.

"Maybe, I didn't know it was yours," she professes.

"No worries," I assure her. "You're welcome to my seed. Got anything in return?"

She hasn't, and offers to give back my seed. I tell her she can keep it, and seizing the moment I blur: "Would you like to move in with me? I know it's a bit forward."

Tactfully, she claims: "I'd like to explore some first."

Given that the entire island can be navigated in about two minutes, I take this as a snub. Desperately pointing to my humble collection of flax-processing equipment and its convenient proximity to a tar pit, I plead. "I live here. We could be happy. You'd want for nothing..."

"What about Egypt?" asks Vallaara. "I feel strangely compelled to travel there."

"We can go there together," I implore. "I've almost built a boat. You could get a suntan,



you look a bit pale." But she's already backing off, politely rejecting me with: "Thank you, I might do that. Have fun Hillick." As she disappears into the distance, I bawl: "Come back, I'm lonely," but she's already gone.

ANGEL OF MERCY

Toiling through the solitude and depression, I finally finish the boat and make it to Egypt. Within minutes I meet a beautiful girl called GoodAngel who invites me to join her guild, the Red Sand Glass Emporium. She even gives me a tour of the magnificent facilities, including the Kitchens, the camel pen and the pottery, where she's courteous enough to ignore my joke about her "nice jugs." That was misjudged.

A hard but fair mistress, GoodAngel teaches me the rudiments of animal husbandry, before sending me into the fields to scatter the good seed. I'm moving on. I'm processing flax. I'm making jugs. One day I hope to be in charge of the camels. Choose life. Choose Egypt. □

"It's hardly a swingers party, but this is as good as it gets. The easily-pleased Kaotika pipes up: 'Oh, flaxing lessons. Fantastic!'"



Women, children and freelance journalists first.

WE'RE IN



Voice control with natural language support

Take control as the commander of the USMC battalion through campaign episodes in Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003

Move up the ranks, get promoted and win medals throughout the game

Missions unfolding from dawn to dusk with realistic weather conditions to contend with Over 100 different types of player controllable military units and weapon systems

Dynamic camera system puts you at the heart of the action

Ultra realistic rendered vehicles

No resource gathering and building. All action!

AND ALL-OUT WAR AT THAT. NO RESOURCE GATHERING NO BUILDING JUST ON THE MOMENT DECISIONS THAT WILL AFFECT THE LIVES OF EVERY SOLDIER ON YOUR BATTLEFIELD. CONTROL EVERY OFFENSIVE THROUGH THE REAL-TIME VOICE CONTROL VIA MICROPHONE [INCLUDED] AND MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD. WITH DRY AND REAL BATTLEFIELDS PRESENTED IN EXCEPTIONAL DETAIL, WOLF OF STEEL MAKES WAR SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT.

KING OF WAR



INCLUDES
FREE
HEADSET



WILL OF STEEL™



HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

SIZE MATTERS



■ HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand

▲ Research suggests that a large majority of PC users, like a large majority of car drivers, go shopping for retail therapy rather than any particular need to upgrade. If that's you, I must recommend a ViewSonic PJ755D projector which was sent my way for testing over Christmas. At £1,500, it's not especially cheap, but the delight of having one reproduce your favourite DVDs as colossal, full-colour, high-resolution images on the back wall of your lounge is hard to describe. Paired with a decent amplifier, *The Lord Of The Rings* is as good as it was in the cinema – throw in inexpensive snacks and cold drinks from your own fridge and it's unbeatable.

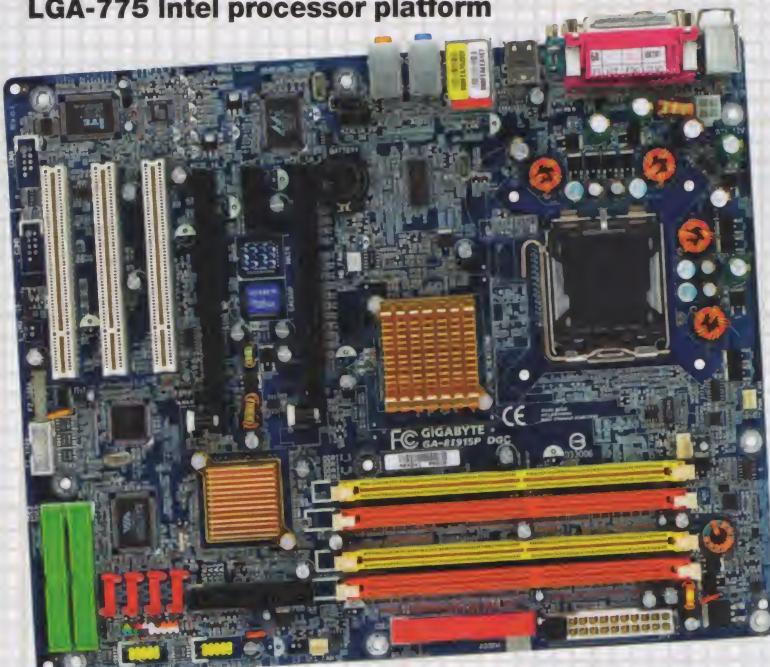
With 2,700 lumens – as I'm sure you know, a lumen is a unit of flux equal to the amount of light given out through a solid angle of one steradian by a point source of one candela intensity radiating uniformly in all directions – it's capable of performing all its tricks in the daytime, and at just 33dB, it's no louder than a dog snoozing by your feet. It even has an Airwolf-like 'whisper mode' to reduce that to 30dB, which is about the same as a dead dog underneath a pile of damp washing in the adjacent room. In other words, it's impressively quiet.

There are also a boggling array of holes on the back. These include analogue and digital PC video, S-video, component and composite connectors, plus full support for HDTV. If you were reading these pages this time last year (hello mum!), you may well remember my experience with an older model and *Battlefield 1942*. With a resolution of 1024x768, the PJ755D is significantly better – plus its 4,000-hour bulb means you'll be playing *Battlefield 4* before it needs replacing.

If you've got the money and need a winter pick-me-up, get the ViewSonic. You won't regret it...

A MOTHERBOARD MADE FOR TWO

GIGABYTE launches first dual PCI-Express motherboard for the LGA-775 Intel processor platform



Slimboy fat:
the X850
is the first
RADEON card
to demand a
two-slot cooler.

HOT ON THE heels of the 3D1, a bleeding-edge desktop graphics solution featuring dual integrated NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT processors, GIGABYTE has announced a dual PCI-Express motherboard for Intel processors.

The GA-8I915P Dual Graphic (price TBA) blends the output of any two 16x PCI-Express video cards in order to dramatically improve rendering capabilities, fill-rates and all-round gaming performance. GIGABYTE claims that its new Dual Graphic system can enhance benchmark results by 50 per cent or more.

NOT LIKE BEFORE

Previously, if you wanted to take advantage of a double-whammy video solution, you had to buy specific NVIDIA SLI products such as the GeForce 6600 GT. Additionally, SLI has become very GeForce/Athlon-specific, with gamers restricted to choosing between a small number of AMD64 boards based around the nForce4 chipset.

As well as a new-found graphical agility, the GA-8I915P incorporates GIGABYTE Quad View technology. This enables the display to be output to four individual screens – as well as

GAME ON

The GA-8I915P Dual Graphic is supplied with GIGABYTE ShieldWare, a software suite consisting of a number of tune-up utilities aimed at power users and gamers.

CPU Intelligent Accelerator 2

Detects processor load and automatically adjusts CPU power to maximise system performance. When playing games or encoding video and audio, the processor is tweaked to provide better results.

Memory Intelligent Booster 2

Maximises memory performance and bandwidth up to 10 per cent. Shortens memory latency time and enhances system power without sacrificing stability – but you need to use GIGABYTE-approved RAM modules.

increasing productivity in the workplace, gamers are promised the ability to open different windows and opposing camera views on specific monitors. We gamers often dream of such things, and it'll be interesting to see if Quad View is able to meet some fairly high expectations.

As you might expect, the newcomer features onboard 7.1 Intel High Definition Audio with support for Dolby Digital, DTS and Pro Logic IIx. There are eight USB 2.0 connectors and three firewire ports. Storage capabilities include SATA and Intel Matrix.

If you're curious and want to find out more about the GA-8I915P, steady your browser and point it towards uk.gigabyte.com, where a whole world of info is waiting for you...

CPU Adjustable Multiplier

Enables you to change the Pentium multiplier value, which is normally locked. Reduce the multiplier in order to gain flexibility for increasing the FSB, and accordingly the memory bus.

Robust Graphics Booster

Boost graphics performance in DirectX-8 and DirectX-9 games through video processor and memory performance optimisations. A few BIOS tweaks and you're away.

EasyTune 5

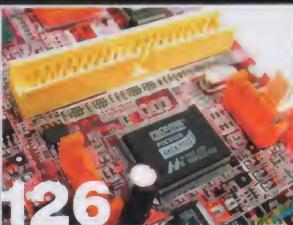
Overhauled EasyTune tool now includes consoles for CPU Intelligent Accelerator, Memory Intelligent Booster and SmartFan.



124

REVIEWS

Rockin' router – and much more!



126

DEAR WANDY

Form an orderly queue please...



128

WATCHDOG

Rubbish companies sorted



130

BUYER'S GUIDE

I want! I want! I want!

ATHLON GONE

AMD recommends its customers avoid OEM chips



Buying an Athlon? Get it boxed.

BACK IN January, Taiwanese police raided an industrial area and seized a substantial number of counterfeit AMD processors from an electronics firm. Original reports suggested that more than a million products had been impounded in the swoop, but recent sources say the figure is not as high – probably less than 60,000.

The haul consisted primarily of fake Athlon XP and Athlon 64 chips that had been misappropriated from packaging and testing plants in Asia, before being shipped to Taiwan. AMD is well aware that its products are revered for their performance, stability and overclocking features, and so normally destroys any chips that fail quality checks.

The US chip-maker has confirmed that a "large number" of fake Athlons were seized, and added that end-users should stick to boxed processors in order to avoid

counterfeit products. "We recommend customers buy AMD processors only from authorised vendors through the Processor-in-a-Box program. This will help ensure that they're purchasing the highest quality product and have access to the normal three-year warranty."

Various news sources have hinted that a substantial number of bad Athlons have been stolen over time, then remarked and re-sold in Europe and China. AMD has yet to confirm the scale of the operation.



AntiSpyware picks up RealVNC as a moderate threat, but doesn't even notice Internet Explorer.

SHUTTING THE GATES

Microsoft to the rescue?

HEARD THE conspiracy theory that suggests utility developers are writing their own viruses in order to feed the billion-dollar anti-virus industry? What about the one where Microsoft allows spyware to proliferate on Windows through deliberate security flaws, so one day it can launch a product to clean it all up?

Then you won't be surprised to learn that Microsoft has released its new anti-spyware tool, AntiSpyware (the product is the work of Giant Company Software, a New York-based developer Microsoft bought out last year). Laughably, Microsoft asks you to authorise an ActiveX control before you can use the trial, meaning you have to close Firefox and open Internet Explorer to start the download. An auspicious start.

Running AntiSpyware revealed that my system was 'infected' with nothing but RealVNC, a remote desktop utility trusted by millions of people around the globe. It also tried to remove Firefox as my default browser.

Visit www.microsoft.com/athome/security for your own copy – and remember to read all the small print.

SNIPPETS



SHUSH UPPY

Another mention for QuietPC this month, as the retailer has announced an AcoustiPack kit pre-cut for Small Form Factor machines. AcoustiPack is a 4mm thick acoustic composite material – a 1mm layer of dense barrier and 3mm condensed foam designed to prevent sound from passing through it. If you use your SFF as a media centre in your lounge or bedroom, the £15 AcoustiPack is a cheap and effective way of keeping the noise down. You can even use it on consoles and other set-top boxes. www.quietpc.com



XL PRICING

In last month's look at the expanded RADEON X800 range, we predicted that the X800 XL, arguably ATI's most important high-end card to date, would hit stores with a price of around £250. You'll be happy to hear that our predictions were correct and that you can now order an X800 XL online from several manufacturers. The card is a direct response to the GeForce 6800 GT, and with a similar specification turns up some storming benchmarks results. Crucially for ATI, it's a whole lot cheaper than the NVIDIA GT. Go get 'em!



XBOX MAX

Uh-oh. Microsoft boss Bill Gates has been talking about how Xbox has always been his vision of the "digital lifestyle", bragging that his monster console now outsells the PlayStation. The guess is that the Xbox 2 will be a convergence of a number of key MS platforms, enabling owners to play games and music, use MSN Messenger and compute wirelessly without getting up from the sofa. Definitely something to watch. www.microsoft.com

DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update Utility	6.0.1.1002	7-May-04	1.5MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	5.10	17-Sep-04	26.8MB	www.nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	455vp1	25-Nov-04	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.99 Beta	06-Aug-04	2.7MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.12	13-Dec-04	22.1MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	66.93	09-Nov-04	17.8MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Creative Audigy 4 Pro Update	3.00.55	20-Dec-04	20.95MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com



Sadly, counterfeit chips aren't usually this obvious.

KLS-5810

WIRELESS ROUTER

£79 | Manufacturer: KCORP |
Phone: 020 8622 3099 | www.kcorplifestyle.com

Networking fun, all-in-one

THE KLS-5810

is an ADSL modem, router, wireless access point and four-port 10/100Mbps Swiss Army knife. You can connect four PCs to the holes in its backside or link it to another switch on your LAN. As with most products of this specification and price, the KCORP comes with an RJ-11 cable for your broadband line, an RJ-45 patch cable for your PC, plus a micro-filter, power supply and a one-year warranty.

Configuring the thing is a lot less exciting. Its Web interface lacks the visual appeal of a Netgear, the completeness of a Vigor and the simplicity of a Zyxel – it also needs more testing back at the factory.

The auto-configuration wizard was wrong about my connection settings, the password box doesn't like being left blank (BT users take note), and some of the help screens are abrupt and confusing. Not only that, but I had endless



trouble connecting to its WEP-enabled wireless.

But once you've familiarised yourself with the odd layout and overlooked its shortcomings, most of which will be addressed in future firmware updates, the KLS-5810 meets or exceeds the needs of Johnny Gamer.

In addition to handling multiplayer traffic transparently, its support for Universal Plug and Play means any Windows

XP user with a UPnP product – MSN Messenger and the next version of Trillian (hopefully) being the most obvious examples – won't need to reconfigure the router to get everything talking to one other. Once you've got it set up and

running, you'll forget it's there – and there's no higher praise for an all-in-one ADSL modem, router, wireless access point and 4-point switch than that.

SPECIFICATIONS

KCORP SILVER SERIES 54G
KLS-5810
802.11b (11Mbps), 802.11g (54Mbps)
WEP 64/128, WPA-PSK
Firewall and MAC filtering
4 x 10/100 LAN
1 x 10/100 WAN
Web-based management
External PSU and micro-filter

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ All-in-one product
- ✓ Firewall
- ✓ UPnP
- ✗ Web interface

80

A worthy alternative to the big names

FORMULA VF WHEEL

USB STEERING WHEEL

£29 | Manufacturer: Logitech
Phone: 020 7309 0127
www.logitech.co.uk

You pays your money...

SOLD IN America as the NASCAR Racing Wheel, Logitech's Formula VF looks and feels like something a NASCAR fan would strap to the front of his pickup as a mascot. Its three-spoke design is identical to that seen inside sporty models of the Ford Capri throughout the '70s, plus it feels flimsy and insubstantial like something Mothercare would sell to the under fives. But hey, it costs less than 30 quid...

Unlike its considerably more expensive rubber-coated siblings, the Formula VF comes with suckers rather than clamps, so unless you use it on a glass smooth, perfectly clean surface, you have to keep smacking it

into place while your car

does a James Dean into the scenery. There are extensible wings which add to the width of the base and allow you to place the thing in your lap, but nobody serious about racing games – certainly nobody serious enough to buy a fake steering wheel – drives like that. The Force

Feedback engine does a good enough job of 'making it real', particularly when it's in your lap baby, but something this plasticky and 10-inches across is never going to pass muster with anyone but console owners.

Additionally, the pedal-set is hinged the old-fashioned way, meaning you push rather than pivot, and thus the pedals have a tendency to slide away from you like a puppy on laminate flooring. The Saitek R440

(issue 135, 82 per cent) gets around this by moving the hinge to the top, as indeed do all premium wheels, but we have to come back to the Formula VF's £29 price tag – there's no getting away from it. Most games are more than that.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Force feedback
- ✓ Cheap and cheerful
- ✗ Feels like a PlayStation product
- ✗ No desk clamp

73

For the budget-conscious

LOGITECH MX1000

MOUSE

£59 | Manufacturer: Logitech | Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

The perfect mouse? Take a closer look...



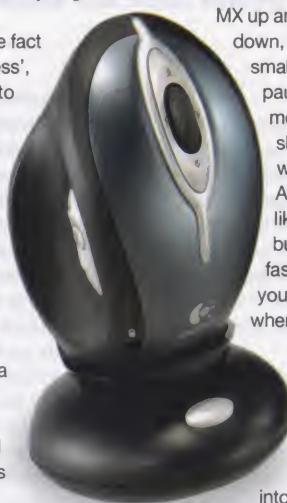
LOGITECH'S

flagship MX1000 uses a class one laser to track movements over almost any surface, from the confines of your mousepad to the glass of your monitor (why?). The results are as dazzling as technology suggests – it's 20 times more sensitive than optical, and despite being wireless is completely free of lag.

However, if you ignore its glorious specifications, the MX1000 has so many flaws it's impossible to know where to start. For starters, it's right-handed and too heavy, carrying a third as many ounces again as the MX510 and being twice – twice – the weight of my trusty

Microsoft Blue. When all that flab changes direction on the move, the inertia is really quite obtrusive, making fast movements such as rocket-jumps or circle-strafes dead difficult to pull off. You end up a dead easy target for opponents.

Then there's the fact it's billed as 'wireless', yet it requires you to plug its cradle into the mains. So while you don't have a cable out the back of the mouse, you do have a cable out the back of the recharging cradle and another going from the cradle to a power socket. Wasn't going wireless supposed to make things less messy?



The insanity continues. Because the scroll wheel tilts for side-to-side movement and the clicker is sprung too firmly, the pressure required makes it easy to tip the wheel rather than push it. Worse, when you pick the MX up and put it back down, there's this small but infuriating pause as the mouse goes to sleep and then wakes up again. At first it seems like no big deal, but if you play fast games and lift your mouse slightly when centring it on the pad, it'll end up driving you round the bend.

I nearly smashed it into pieces.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Works anywhere
- ✓ Battery charge indicator
- ✗ Too flawed for gaming
- ✗ MX510 is half the cost

55

A supremely clever waste of your money

In short, although I'm a big fan of premium Logitech gear – the MX510 remains the best gaming mouse and the Z-5500 speakers have to be heard to be believed – the MX1000 is pure folly. Only when its technology has been refined, put on a diet and moved to the lower ranks will it be worth considering. For now, save your money.

X700 PRO

PCI-EXPRESS GRAPHICS

£150 | Sapphire Technology | Phone: 01793 423830 | www.sapphiretech.com

Up with the 6600 GT, but the price is up in the clouds

REMEMBER how NVIDIA's 6600 GT beat the entire X600 range into a crimson pulp during our video card battleground a couple of issues ago? The X700 you see here is ATI's return salvo, with a specification just as deadly as that of our GeForce champ. It boasts PCI-Express, GDDR-3 memory, 8-pixel pipelines and a 128-bit interface. This particular Sapphire variant has twice the memory of the Sparkle 6600 GT (issue 150, 92 per cent) and some top games in the box, but is £15 more expensive.

Running through our standard set of benchmarks reveals that the RV410-based

X700 is an impressive performer, equalling the 6600 GT in *Far Cry*, shading it in *UT2K4* and streaking some way ahead in 3DMark05. Everywhere else, the Radeon was but a whisker behind, although its 3DMark03 result of less than 7,000 is a strangely underwhelming blemish.

The problem with the X700 Pro is not the odd benchmark slip-up, but the price. At £150, it's low on value and creeping into high-end territory – spend another 30 quid and you can buy the bottom rung of high-end hardware. So while the Sapphire

package is very obviously a quality product, it makes more sense to spend less money on a better card – one that's also available with an AGP interface. At £135, Sparkle's 6600 GT remains our must-have mainstreamer.



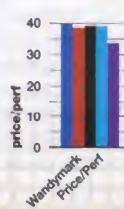
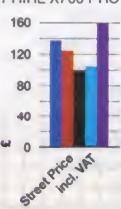
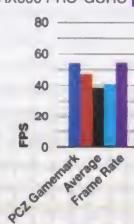
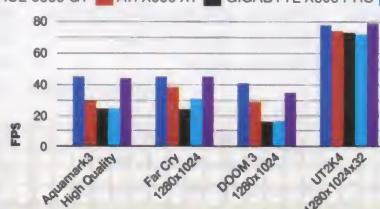
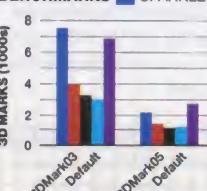
SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE: 256MB, GDDR-3 ATI Radeon X700 PRO

ANCILLARIES: VGA to DVI converter, Composite TV cable, S-Video TV cable, S-Video converter

BUNDLE: Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Prince Of Persia, PowerDVD 5, Installation CD

BENCHMARKS



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fast for a mid-range card
- ✓ Overall package quality
- ✗ Expensive for a mid-range card
- ✗ Low on value

78

Fast and spurious

The COMBINED SCORE is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The WANDMARK™ is the combined average score divided by the price.



DEAR WANDY

The world's an imperfect place y'know. Screws fall out, things fall apart and computers don't play nicely. No man knows this better than our Wandy – if you've got a problem, he can help...

■ DR IN DA HOUSE Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing. If you have any top tips to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

NEW BUILD

Q I recently finished building my first computer and it's not working as well as I hoped. The machine is based around an Intel D865GBF board with a 3.0GHz Prescott and 512MB DDR400 RAM. I used a 30GB Maxtor, a FX 5900XT with the latest drivers and my operating system is XP.

My first problem is that when starting Windows, the display sometimes disappears and reappears, then does it again whenever I move the mouse or open a window. This seems to be because Windows reports four monitors in the device manager – the problem stops if I delete the three 'default' screens and leave the Plug and Play one and restart, but it's annoying.

My second problem is to do with running games. After building my computer, I loaded *Dawn Of War* and *Rome: Total War*, but the computer has a habit of falling over when I try to run them. When it restarts, it tells me that my graphics card caused a system instability by failing to complete a drawing operation, and that I should update my drivers. If the games do load, the display is garbled with lots of odd pixels. In *Rome*, the sea changes colour and both games slow down. The only discrepancy I can find is that my graphics card wants a 350W power supply and I have a 200W unit. Would this account for my problems?

Douglas Chappell

A Regarding your screen problem, I'd grab the latest set from NVIDIA, locate the appropriate driver for your monitor, then uninstall your existing GeForce drivers and reboot. First, install the monitor driver. To do this, right-click on the My Computer icon, choose Manage from the menu, then

highlight Device Manager in the tree. Expand the Monitors branch, double-click the Plug and Play monitor icon, select the Driver tab and click the Update Driver button.

Choose to install the driver from a location you specify, then elect to manually select the driver rather than to have Windows search for it. Click the Have Disk button, and browse to the .INF file you downloaded. Complete the Wizard and then install the new NVIDIA set you downloaded. Reboot. Next, get the latest version of Driver Cleaner from drivercleaner.net and make sure there are no remnants kicking about.

I'd then get the latest INF utility from support.intel.com, the latest version of DirectX from the Microsoft website, and make myself a large cup of Spiced Chai Latte – £2.29 per 250g from your nearest Tesco. If the phantom Default Monitor devices appear, rather than deleting them, you could try nobbling them by right-clicking their icon in the Device Manager and choosing Disable. While there are setups and circumstances where you would expect to see multiple entries, yours isn't one of them.

Now, onto your second problem. If working through the aforementioned reinstall doesn't cure your problem, I would point to your video card being defective. Garbage littered about the screen is a sure sign that one of the chips on the board is unhappy, and if it's within warranty you should seek a replacement – if you're offered a product of equal value, go for the 6600 GT.

By the way, there's a small-to-medium chance that your suspicions are correct and that the strange behaviour is caused by your power supply – a couple of hundred watts are

not enough. You should look to replace the PSU at the earliest opportunity. Spend £50 or more on a Tagan or Antec of 400W or higher.

DEAR DOPEY

Q Just a small point in regard to Richard Wales' letter in issue 149. While you taught me something about JBOD, your response recommended that Richard buy another Raptor to go with his existing model. Trouble is, Western Digital Raptors are produced with a SATA interface exclusively, and so it was wrong to mention master/slave configurations – the SATA controller only supports one driver per channel! Just thought I'd mention this, as I'm in a pedantic mood.

Tom Hill



Even Wandy gets it wrong sometimes...

irrelevant to a Raptor owner – or indeed the owner of any SATA device – as they have no jumpers to set. While I feel a bit daft for having made such a goof, Mr Wales would not have ended up doing anything he shouldn't (it's not like I asked him to wipe the drive in his tumble-drier).

I also feel somewhat impressed that my readers are paying full and proper attention on the very few occasions when I am not, and for their diligence both Tom and Danny find themselves with £25 in their pocket. This is only the second blooper in over three years of Dear Wandy though, so don't go thinking you can get rich...

DOPEY STRIKES BACK

Q Just thought I'd point out that your article in issue 149 leads the user to believe that he can RAID 0 two Raptor drives that are different sizes. As you know, this is impossible – both disks need to be identical in order for the RAID process to work. JBOD is different; you can have any size disks to create one drive.

Anon

Regarding your Dear Wandy from issue 149. I'm sure Richard Wales was over the moon to get a reply – I would be – but he'd be happier still if the advice given was correct! As you're no doubt aware, the Western Digital Raptor drives are SATA only, so giving the poor guy advice on IDE jumper settings wasn't quite the answer that he required. I'm hoping that a full and grovelling apology will soon appear on your hallowed pages.

Danny Cooke

A My advice was pretty much sound, in that anyone installing a new HDD needs to check the drive's jumper settings, but it was

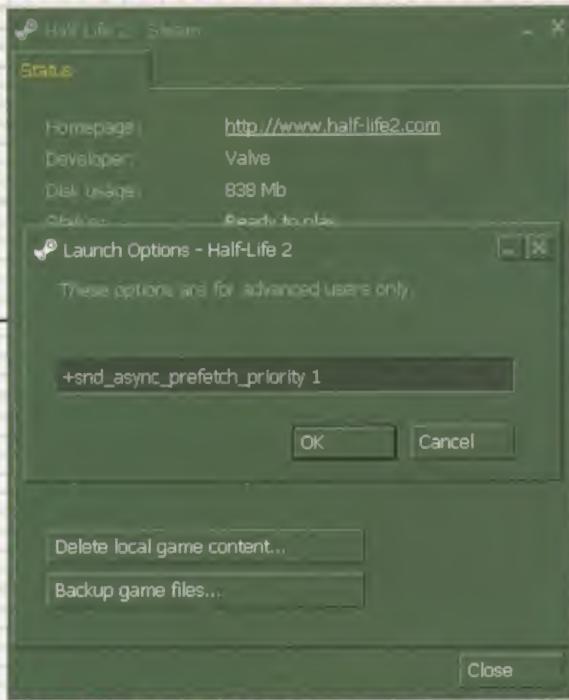
Actually, no. While it may depend on the RAID controller, I've yet to come across one that wouldn't allow me to create an array from disks of different sizes. When creating RAID 1 arrays, I habitually use different drives from different manufacturers – having had long and painful experience of duff HDDs, this spreads the risk of failure by ensuring the devices are not from the same batch if a patch proves faulty. Clever, eh?

DISABLED LAND TURTLE

Q I have a 2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM and 128MB Radeon 9800. Most games work fine, but I'm experiencing

Chai Latte. For the discerning nerd.





The `+snd_async_prefetch_priority` flag was introduced in the first patch, but most people found it made no difference.

some stuttering in *Half-Life 2*. During big fights or in open spaces, it stutters like a crippled tortoise swimming through a lake of treacle. I'm sure I'm not alone when I say a) that I'm mad keen into gaming and b) am not totally clear of how to improve performance on games – other than download all available graphic card drivers, defrag regularly, check for spyware and so on.

Incidentally, I looked at the specs for *EverQuest II* and I can't afford to splash out on the required new hardware. Can you impart any pearls of wisdom for me and 1,000,000 other worried gamers?

GFMachine

A There have been a lot of people complaining that *Half-Life 2* fits and stutters in all manner of inappropriate places. I've played the game on six totally different PCs now, and one of them has the problem so badly that it's not actually possible to do anything. A lot of the dialog goes right out the window, and there are toe-curling moments every few minutes when the action comes to a grinding halt and you find yourself reaching instinctively for the reset button. Strangely, *Counter-Strike: Source* remains eminently playable and suffers no such problems.

Valve's response has been to direct people at beta ATI and NVIDIA drivers – see

the Support section at steampowered.com for the actual links – and to ask gamers to reduce their screen resolution and levels of anti-aliasing. You should also right-click on the *Half-Life 2* entry in your Steam menu, choose Properties, then click the Launch Options button and put `+snd_async_prefetch_priority 1` into the entry box. It didn't help the stuttering machine at Wandy HQ, and I'm not hopeful that it'll sort you out – but you never know.

As for new games requiring posh new hardware, that's only to be expected. Look at the games we were playing 10-15 years ago, then appreciate how amazing titles look today and how much we take for granted. The only way for us to make similar leaps towards

"During big fights or in open spaces, it stutters like a crippled tortoise swimming through a lake of treacle"

cinematic visuals and realism is to keep demanding hardware that's better and faster. That said, PlayStation games seem to get better and better without the underlying technology changing – I agree that developers need to spend a lot more time learning to squeeze more from what we already have.

GREECE FRIGHTENING

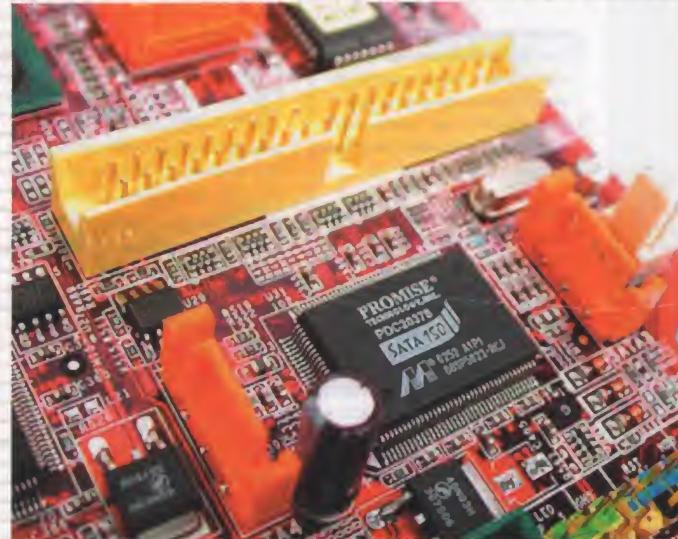
Q From the moment I upgraded to Windows 2000, I've never been able to browse the PC ZONE CD/DVD via its own browser. It starts loading and then after a few seconds I get an 'Exception Error'. Then it quits. I've formatted my PC four to five times since and I'm pretty sure that I'm doing things OK – not only because I'm in the computer business myself, but also because I run a variety of applications with no problems – Office, Nero, *Far Cry*, *Doom 3* and so on. Has anyone reported anything similar?

Ilias Doumas, Athens

A I could tell that Ilias wasn't from around these parts straight away, simply from the fact that his English was damn near perfect... Can anyone help him out? Does anyone else have the same trouble? I've no idea what might be causing this but would like to get to the bottom of it.



Well, I couldn't find anything amiss.



The Promise 20378 RAID controller does the job, but doesn't often make sense.

BLASTED BIOS

Q I recently upgraded my system to an AMD 3000+, 1GB RAM, GeForce 6800 GT all on a K8T Neo-FIS2 motherboard. The problem is that when I boot up, I'm told that the 'BIOS is not installed'. Windows then boots up as usual.

I was advised to reformat my hard drive as the HDD might somehow be making the PC use the BIOS from my old motherboard which was also AMD. This failed, so I tried flashing the BIOS. As far as I know, I followed the instructions, and still I get the same message on loading. Is the error an error itself, or is it possible it's running on an older BIOS from a previous board? While the system is faster than before, when you fork out hard-earned cash, you don't want any of it wasted.

Chris

A First, your motherboard's BIOS is not on your hard drive. It's held on an EEPROM (ie a 'programmable chip') on the board itself, and it provides a primitive method for monitoring and configuring the various devices that are connected to it. In layman's terms, it's the junction box of your motherboard. You can be assured that there's no chance whatsoever that a

left-over drive partition containing remnants of your old operating system is going to affect how it works, and that reformatting will have no effect on it. The only way you can change a BIOS is by updating the EEPROM with software supplied by the manufacturer in a process known as flashing.

Now on to the message. The error you're seeing pop up is not an error from your K8T board BIOS but from the BIOS of the Promise 20378 onboard RAID controller. It's a rather stupid message, in that it's misleading and prompts thousands of people to ask questions identical to yours. Then again, I've been using Promise products for over a decade – the first being an IDE cache controller back in 1992 – and over time have learned to translate from Taiwanese English into English English. All it means is that no drives are attached to the RAID controller, and my advice would be to simply ignore it or do the sensible thing and buy two SATA disks for a RAID 1 array. If you have a copy of issue 149, I describe RAID in detail there. 

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com



WATCHDOG

2005 is barely a month old, and already some companies aren't sticking to their New Year's resolution of putting the customer first. Shame on them...

■ TAKING NO PRISONERS Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry - we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'.

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please furnish us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

Half-Life 2: lost in (transit) action.

NO LIFE 2

Look, we absolutely love *Half-Life 2* – probably more than you because we just sit round playing it all day while you're at work (*P45 dispatched – Ed*). But we're still not sure why people pre-ordered it months and months before release.

Of course, with Valve's classic, perhaps such foresight is understandable – but alas not always a good idea, as reader Dean White found out when he pre-ordered his copy of *Half-Life 2* from Amazon... In 2003. Alas, during this lengthy gestation period, he bought a new car, had a baby and moved house, and that's the problem – while he updated his new address details, Amazon promptly ignored them.

Come V-Day and now turned up: "This was followed by an email from Amazon saying the order had been dispatched but to my old address," says Dean. "I've tried to contact the residents, but they say nothing has been received. So I called Amazon to be told 'tough', there's nothing it can do. Can you help me out?"

Well, Amazon might say 'tough' to you, but when we dropped the company a line, it promptly changed its tune and is happy to replace your order as soon possible. Hopefully you should have it by now Dean. If only all our complaints could be resolved this simply...

A BIT OF A MISH MESH

Half-Life 2 has inadvertently been causing another reader problems – in this case, David Hamer. He flogged his motorbike and (incredibly) managed to get permission from his wife to go out and buy a new Mesh PC to play the game.

"During the first week, however, the strangest thing started to happen," recalls our David. "On shutting down my PC, it would then wait for two seconds, then restart itself. I contacted Mesh, who arranged a collection for the next day."

Alas, according to David, the couriers never turned up: "I phoned again and arranged another date for collection, but yet again the couriers never turned up." So he phoned up Mesh again and another collection was booked – and Mesh even bunged in a couple of games as a gesture of goodwill.

But still no sign of the courier. By this point, David threw in the towel and told Mesh not to bother with the pick-up at all – he'd just live with the problem. Bad choice: "Weeks passed and finally with *Half-Life 2* installed on my PC, the problems got worse," explains David. "My PC would just turn off like it had been the victim of a power cut. First after an hour, then 20 minutes, 15, ten and then finally five."

Reluctantly, he called Mesh and reported the problem. On the second attempt at collection, the courier actually turned up and collected his PC: "I was also told by Mesh that it would waive the normal carriage costs for the trouble I'd had," says David. "Nice one, but then two weeks passed and I phoned to ask about the repairs. The company told me that the processor had been replaced and once it received the carriage costs, it'd be dispatched."

Somewhat hacked off that the company had seemingly reneged on its offer of a free return delivery, David got on to customer services, who restated that he would have to pay £50 for his PC to be sent back to him.

I.O.U.
A FREE
DELIVERY

Always get anything promised verbally in writing...

"I'm really miffed with Mesh – it would have been nice if the company had stuck to its word. Collection-wise, admittedly, Mesh has not been at fault, but customer care-wise, I believe it certainly has been."

Indeed. So what does Mesh have to say for itself? "We've been in touch with our customer and have replaced the faulty CPU under the terms of the warranty. The customer possesses a return-to-base three-year warranty and strictly speaking, he's responsible for the carriage to and from Mesh – either with his own couriers, by hand, or we can arrange carriage on his behalf."

Mesh is happy to confirm though that you have now received your PC "in good working order and we have waived the return carriage charge as a gesture of goodwill. Furthermore due to a previous missed pick-up, we did also compensate the customer with a refunded pick-up charge and free game pack." Going well so far isn't it?

HARD TIMES FOR HARD DRIVE...

'The customer is always right.' It's a saying that must make companies quietly rue the day it was ever uttered. But perhaps that old phrase is spot-on – take reader Robert Green who bought a brand-new custom-built computer from Eclipse at the end of 2003.

"In September of this year, the computer gave up and would

not power-up at all," explains Rob. "I contacted Eclipse, who said it was the PSU and replaced it. However, on November 5 the computer made a strange noise and froze for about 15-20 seconds, before continuing without any problems."

But the whirring noises and freezing continued and the computer then began resetting itself or refusing to boot at all. It sounded like a hard drive problem to Rob. He again contacted Eclipse, who agreed with him. Accordingly, he sent his pride and joy back at the beginning of November. Two weeks later and Rob was finally told that it was actually a software problem with his installation of Windows.

As there was no hardware fault with the PC, this meant Rob was charged a £35 plus VAT labour fee for the repair. Trouble is, once he got the system home and after installing Service Pack 2, the hard drive started making whirring noises and freezing once again.

Rob took the machine back in and this time Eclipse said it was a problem with Service Pack 2 – and he would be charged for that to be fixed too. But as Rob points out: "Of course it can say it's software problems if the hard drive is all messed up and corrupting the data."

And that's a very good point. So we dispatched your complaint to Eclipse and after taking an eternity to get back to us, a spokesperson told us that "we now have the system booked in and will be doing a courtesy exchange on the hard drive for the customer." Not the best customer service we've ever seen, but at least your hard drive should be functioning correctly. A clean sweep! 

Rob's PC problems are software-based. No, really...



No Contest!



Now you can enjoy state-of-the-art PC gaming with a Hyundai ImageQuest TFT display engineered specifically with high-end gamers in mind.

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GamersEurope.com, 10/2004

www.hyundaiQ.com info@hyundaiQ.co.uk

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HYUNDAI
HYUNDAI IMAGEQUEST

BUYER'S GUIDE

February is the month of love, and what better way to say 'I love you' than with some new kit?

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

EDITOR'S CHOICE



A8V DELUXE WIRELESS

STREET PRICE £82
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340
WEBSITE uk.asus.com

For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.

MOTHERBOARDS



ATHLON 64 3500

STREET PRICE £174
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.

PROCESSORS



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hanger-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

HDDS



GEFORCE 6800 GT

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfxgraphics.co.uk

The release of *Doom 3* means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.

GRAPHICS CARD



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

SOUNDCARDS

RECOMMENDED



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM

STREET PRICE £87
MANUFACTURER Micro-Star
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo 2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2x ATA and 4x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.



P4 3.2GHZ

STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

With the price of the 3.0GHz now dropping to well below £200, it makes sense to spend just a little extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £36
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.



GEFORCE 6600 GT

STREET PRICE £129
MANUFACTURER Sparkle
TELEPHONE 0191 4210166
WEBSITE www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

Never before has such high performance been available at such a low price. Forget the old mainstream NVIDIA technology, the new stuff is quicker than many of the old high-end cards, and in many tests this 6600 GT beats the FX 5950 Ultra – pair it with an AMD64 and you're laughing. Sparkle's bundle is on the mean side, but we've not yet found a GeForce maker who builds to a higher standard.



AUDIGY 2 ZS

STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.



IC7-MAX3

STREET PRICE £94
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Getting on a bit now, the Canterbury-based IC7-MAX3 still provides a solid foundation for any Socket 478 Pentium-based games rig. It even looks great. The board has 5.1 onboard audio with optical out, Gigabit LAN, four-port SATA RAID, and ABIT's usual array of enthusiast-friendly features including SoftMenu Overclocking and OTES cooling. It's a real power-user's delight. If you don't want to stray from Intel, look no further.



ATHLON 64 4000+

STREET PRICE £480
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, Claw-Hammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue...



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £73
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.



RADEON X700 PRO 256MB

STREET PRICE £150
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE www.sapphretech.com

Hot on the heels of the 6600GT is Sapphire's X700 Pro, featuring PCI-Express, GDDR-3 memory, 8-pixel pipelines and a 128-bit interface. It's a quality product bundled with quality games, and in benchmarks has no trouble keeping up with the runaway GeForce. Unlike the 6600GT, there's no AGP counterpart and it's more money. But if you're looking for a RADEON and maximum mainstream grunt, this is the card for you.



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO

STREET PRICE £144
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



World's Most Powerful VGA EVER...

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX500

STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button and two thumb buttons that speed up Web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £17
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700

STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent - making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch - you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



INTERNET KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software - its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature - lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.



INSPIRE P580 5.1

STREET PRICE £56
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space - and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing - if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £180
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games - Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.



FLATRON L1730P

STREET PRICE £355
MANUFACTURER LG
TELEPHONE 0870 607 5544
WEBSITE uk.lge.com

If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly - it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers.



CML174SXW

STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

We still think the 17-inch CML is one of the best-looking, best-performing flat screens on the market - even though it remains over £300. It delivers a great-quality image, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in a choice of colours to match your kit. If you're wanting to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the sensible, slim bezel Hitachi remains a solid choice.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £398
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Bloating a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop - not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz - and so ideal for gaming.



EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET

STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback - and at this price, it's a steal.



HS300

STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE europe.creative.com

Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.



AUDIO 90

STREET PRICE £23
MANUFACTURER Plantronics
TELEPHONE 0800 410014
WEBSITE www.plantronics.co.uk

If your life is online gaming, you need a headset you can wear without developing earache - and the Audio 90 is the most comfortable set out of all the ones we've tested. The secret lies in the fact that you can pivot the speakers, which means they sit flush on your ear and block out any outside noise. Not the most stylish set on the market, but eminently functional.

MICE

KEYBOARDS

SPEAKERS

HEADSETS





MAILBOX

Love is in the air, everywhere we look around. Even in some parts of Mailbox...

■ READY BREK GLOW Dave Woods

STICKS AND STONES

I'd like to make a quick complaint about Anthony Holden's description of contributors to the Feedback column as 'whiners', 'nay-sayers' and persons who 'have no soul'. I feel these comments were unhelpful, non-constructive and, in short, basically offensive. Differing from his view of HL2 is scarcely a justification for his abuse.

Simon Blackwell

Feedback is your chance to say what you think about our reviews, but we don't have to agree with you – as you don't with us. That's the beauty of it. As for the colourful language, it's intended to be tongue-in-cheek. Although if you don't like Half-Life 2, you're quite clearly insane.

STALKER

Congratulations on your 150th issue, like every other it was superb. I've been buying your mag since issue 65 and I've only ever missed one issue. I was there when PC ZONE cost just £2, I was there when Charlie



Reader Daniel Gilroy loves ZONE as much as us. We salute him.

Brooker ate his own arse, I was there when FIFA was brilliant and I was there when demo discs included cheats and tips.

Now I'm writing this letter, having seen the chilling F.E.A.R. trailer on the DVD, and I'll be there when you reach your 200th issue. So thank you to the team at PC ZONE for giving me years of excitement and joy every time I read your mag. Keep up the fantastic work.

Daniel Gilroy

PS – I have enclosed a photo of your beautiful gifts (above).

PES ONLINE

You reviewed Pro Evolution Soccer 4 and gave it an 89 per cent score, saying there was no online play. Wrong – I play online with hundreds of people. If you don't know how, head to <http://pes4online.acsv.net/> and download the latest patch and the online enabler, which acts as a chatroom where you can challenge people from all over the world. You're then whisked to the team select screen and then to the pitch, where lag-free matches await you!

Ross Hollingsworth

'Tis true. You can play PES online by inputting IP addresses directly into the game, but it's a bit fiddly. This unofficial utility makes getting a game much, much easier. Hallelujah, praise the lord and other higher beings.



Online PES play is here!

DIAMOND GEEZER

First, congratulations on your 150th issue – a good read as always, and here's to another 150. One article that really caught my eye was about Dominik Diamond's return to our screens in When Games Attack. I was an avid fan of

**EMAIL YOUR RANTS TO
MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK**

BANNED!

In a bid to make these pages even more exciting, we're flexing our dictatorial muscle and excising certain dead topics. Write to us about these topics and we won't print your letter, and we definitely won't send you a graphics card. You have been warned...

■ Cheap, dodgy online pharmaceuticals.

■ Abusive letters about getting kicked off the PC ZONE servers for being abusive. Learn your lesson.

■ Household bills. We've had enough already thanks.

watching the shameful, secretly-captured footage. "It's funny isn't it? It is funny, isn't it? Yeah, I think it's funny, isn't it? Dave? Don't you think?"

HEADS UP

I've been buying PC ZONE for many years and have been a subscriber for three. It's the only PC games mag worth reading, but I have a request. Can you please stop sucking Peter Molyneux's c**k?

February's issue was the last straw. Black & White – a 'game that changed the world'? No. Negative. Niet. Nein. Not on my f***ing watch.

Please, for god's sake, get a grip. You should feel ashamed. Look, you may be mates with the fellow, but it's getting old now. Stop it.

Anthony

OK, we'll move on. Mr Spector? Could you unbuckle please?



Diamond: pretty in pink.

SEFTON UNITED

I just watched the video of you playing PES on the discs of issue 150 – class! It reminds me of when I used to play games with my younger brother when I was about 15. My favourite bit is when Jamie Sefton has to wheel himself off at the end after losing. Could you tell him to mind his language though? I've got kids and had to turn it off in a panic after about five seconds until they'd gone to bed.

Brian Pilcher

Jamie Sefton has officially retired from PES after



All's fair in love and PES.



I can't believe it's not either...

SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A SPIFFING NEW GRAPHICS CARD

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 99 BAKER ST, LONDON, W1U 6FP OR MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?

**WIN!
A TOP
GRAPHICS
CARD**





Half-Life? Gay pride? Or both?

GORDON IS A MORON

I just completed *Half-life 2* for the second time and I have only one complaint. The ending.

No, not the fact that the last level was piss-easy, nor the fact that I only understood half of what the G-man said at the end.

No, it's the fact that Gordon didn't end up in bed with Alyx. Over the game, a good relationship develops between them (as much as you can when only one member of the relationship actually talks that is). And it's clear throughout that Alyx wants Gordon, but does Gordon get a bunk-up? No!

Shame on you Valve. Gordon, I feel your pain.

Edward Miles

If you want the real reason that Gordon didn't end up in bed with Alyx, read on...

HALF-PRICE?

After recently finishing *Half-Life 2*, I decided I wanted to sell my copy. I was shocked to learn that in order to pass your copy on, Valve insists you post your CD key to an address in the US and pay it \$10 to reset the key.

I'm sure I'm not the only person to think this is incredibly unfair for the consumer. The piracy excuse can only go so far, and I believe this is a blatant and cynical moneymaking exercise and an attempt to stifle the second-hand market.

I'm sure it would be easy to implement a free de-registration process into the Steam platform. I can't see how this will help fight piracy in any significant way. I won't be buying any more Valve games until it rethinks this policy.

Dominic Evans.

Steam has thrown up a number of issues which haven't sat too well with many people. From what we understand, you can sell the game and transfer the license for free, but the person buying the game needs to pay the \$10 fee to reset the CD key. While it might not be much consolation, at least the exchange rate is favourable.

I ❤ STEAM #1

After reading the amount of trouble others are having with Steam, I'd like to say in its defence that when I bought *Half-Life 2*, it installed and played without any hassle at all. I've had Steam since its conception and have never had any trouble with it – and my system is by no means state of the art. Just thought I should let others know (and Valve) that there is at least one happy customer.

Tony_Yorkshire V1.3.

Ben Garlick

As well as being used as a symbol for radioactive decay constant, the *Half-Life* symbol, the 11th letter of the Greek alphabet, is Lambda. As in the Lambda core. It's also used as a symbol for gay pride, a twist in the plot that will probably feature in *Half-Life 3*.

TSUNAMI APPEAL

No doubt your readers have been watching the tsunami news reports, stunned at the devastation following the massive earthquake off the coast of Sumatra.

A phenomenal amount of support has been given by the British public in the form of monetary donations. You can also help by donating old mobile phones and printer cartridges. To find out what types of mobiles and cartridges we can recycle, and how much we'll give for the items donated, visit www.recyclingappeal.com/tsunami.

BACKCHAT

▲ 2005: IT'S THE FUTURE. NOW...

We asked you for your hopes and fears for 2005? What are you looking forward to? What do you think is going to be the biggest letdown of the year? We want to know, and we want to know now.

Thankfully, we're not the only ones who're hoping to spend it cowering behind the sofa – F.E.A.R. seems to have made quite an impression. On CtChris2000 for one. "I'm looking forward to F.E.A.R. 'cos it looks like it's going to rock!" Adal_Ahmad isn't quite as bold: "My fear for 2005 is F.E.A.R. – I don't want to see a girl in a red cloak and scream like a girl with soiled jeans!" Ruffly_Squirrel has the fear too. He thinks it looks "AAAAAwsome!", but isn't too impressed with what he sees as "Doom 3's lame attempt to jump on the gravity gun bandwagon". Frosty440 is worried that "the scary little girl in F.E.A.R. will climb out of my monitor while I'm playing it."

However, there's always a dissenting voice and this month it's provided by Bru_Man. "I don't see why everyone is going doolally over this. It looked very repetitive and I got bored watching it after a few minutes." And it wasn't just F.E.A.R. that came under attack. "I'm also worried that the super-intelligent AI in STALKER will go and find every object I need before I even figure out where they are." "You don't see why everyone's going doolally?!" spluttered G-Man_007. "You saw the Japanese girl? And you've seen one of the Ring films or The Grudge? If you haven't, then you may be missing the point, but F.E.A.R. is damn scary."

Forget videogames though:

Escaped_Monkey has bigger fish to fry. "In 2005, I predict the fall of democracy, all forms of entertainment being banned, the government introducing 'walking' as a new national pastime and PC ZONE being taken over by a evil, faceless, money-hungry corporation." It'll never happen.



If you have a mobile phone or printer cartridge to donate to the appeal, all you have to do is visit the website or call 08712 505050 and ask for a freepost bag for the Tsumami Recycling

Appeal – then drop your item in the post to us.

Robert Morton
Corporate Responsibility Exec
Redeem plc trading as Eurosource Europe

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I ❤ STEAM #2

I've just read last month's Mailbox and would like to point out a few things to people who don't like Steam. First off, the big rant people seem to have is about activating *Half-Life 2* online. Well I'm sorry, but it does clearly say in the required spec that the game requires an Internet connection for activation. Also, the game only requires activation, so either, shock horror, use a dial-up service for the whole one time you have to use it, or take your PC somewhere that has a Net connection.

Steam incorporates hundreds of servers running downloads for all of the various Valve games. I pre-downloaded *Half-Life 2* and had to wait for the files to unlock, but 40 minutes is hardly a major inconvenience. As for being online to play HL2? Sorry, but I think that's what the offline mode is for... You know, the little box that pops up when you click on Steam without being online?

Why people don't like Steam's other features, I don't know: automatic download of additional content, auto-patch updates, mod support, permanent command line changes for games, built-in dedicated consoles and SDKs, favourite server management... Need I go on?

Steam has been a worthy project for Valve: not only does it incorporate features to protect Valve's content, it also has features that are advantageous to gamers.

Duncan Wardlaw

You see. Proof that not everyone hates Steam. Have a graphics card, Duncan.

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

HALF-LIFE 2



We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.

PUB VU Games DEV Valve
PCZ ISSUE 148



FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140



DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.

PUB Activision DEV id software
PCZ ISSUE 146



CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.

PUB Activision DEV Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Remedy
PCZ ISSUE 136



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.

PUB VU Games DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 147



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV VU Games
PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the PC ZONE solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138



RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

A brutal and brilliant shooter that's infinitely better than Riddick's cinematic outing. It may have started out life on the Xbox, but that's no reason not to try out its own brand of violence and filth.

PUB VU Games DEV Starbreeze
PCZ ISSUE 150

◀ STRATEGY ▶

ROME: TOTAL WAR



An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.

PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 148



LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Melding the best of the hardcore and mainstream markets, this strategic gem combines intuitive gameplay with real-life tactics to create an epic, deeply entertaining experience that's dripping with atmosphere.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific
PCZ ISSUE 149



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games
PCZ ISSUE 129



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters DEV Best Way
PCZ ISSUE 144



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios
PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive DEV Elixir Studios
PCZ ISSUE 132



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

If you're looking for something that doesn't quite fit into the usual template, *Pirates!* is the game for you. With governor's daughters to daily with, trade routes to plunder and land to be lubbered, *Pirates!* is a winner.

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis
PCZ ISSUE 149



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCI* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games DEV Massive Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 143



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some flash visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation; what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.

PUB THQ DEV Relic
PCZ ISSUE 147



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision DEV Stainless Steel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 135

Want to know which game is the best shooter, which is the top strategy or what to play if you want to blow away your mates online? Lucky you're reading the PC ZONE A-list then – home to the greatest games in the land, this is where you can find the titles we rate as the best around. Tuck in...

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best Star Wars game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB Activision DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

Once you get past the bugs and glitches, *Bloodlines* is a deep, absorbing game that everyone with an interest in the genre should play. Great dialogue, clever plot and (despite the dodgy combat), a superb experience.

PUB Activision DEV Troika Games
PCZ ISSUE 150



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 141



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrick's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

He may have gone all moody on us in *Warrior Within*, but we still prefer the Prince's younger, more innocent days of *Sands of Time*. Combat is iffy, granted, but there's a rare charm here that the sequel could not replicate.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



THE SUFFERING

A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.

PUB Midway DEV Surreal Software
PCZ ISSUE 145



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE

Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

**CIVILIZATION III**

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111

**EVIL GENIUS**

It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.

PUB VU Games DEV Elixir
PCZ ISSUE 147

**THE SIMS 2**

We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.

PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 147

**VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG**

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A PC ZONE 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135

**SPACE COLONY**

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios
PCZ ISSUE 136

**ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3**

A stirring return for the ride-creating cash-cow that brings with it a snazzy 3D engine and more coasters than you can shake a stick at. It doesn't quite recall the *Theme Park* glory days, but *RT3* is the closest we've been in ages.

PUB Atari DEV Frontier Developments
PCZ ISSUE 149

**EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM**

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121

**SIM CITY 4**

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125

**GHOST MASTER**

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST II

The best just got soooo much better. As visually alluring as a lingerie-clad supermodel holding a giant meat pie, as full of content as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and as addictive as purple Fruit Pastilles topped with Pringles. Sony has learnt every lesson it could in the five years since the original and produced a MMOG that sets new standards across the board.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 150

**CITY OF HEROES**

It may not have scored as high as the others in our review, but this spandex-wearing, justice-dispensing, superhero-themed MMOG has certainly won over the popular vote. Long-term appeal may be dubious, but for instant-action fun, it simply can't be beaten.

PUB NCsoft DEV Cryptic Studios
PCZ ISSUE 149

**PLANETSIDE**

The eternal war for Auraxis just keeps on going, but now with giant battlemechs thrown into the mix. The subterranean *Core Combat* expansion may have disappeared down its own hole, but recent updates have managed to keep the fighting fresh.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 131

**EVE ONLINE**

Best described as 'Elite Online', the sedate nature of *EVE* has managed to pull in more and more space traders with each passing month. It may not be the most human of MMOGs, but it's definitely worth putting the time into it considering what you get back.

PUB CCP DEV CCP
PCZ ISSUE 130

**ANARCHY ONLINE**

Quirky science-fiction action abounds in this ever-popular take on mankind's distant future. Two major expansions (one practically bigger than the original game) and a forthcoming graphical overhaul is doing more than enough to keep the world of Rubi-ka buzzing.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 148

**FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE**

Probably the best of the non-*EverQuest* fantasy MMOGs (although not by much), this Japanese entry into the genre is about as fully realised a world as you can get. The controls may be cumbersome, but you can't deny the atmosphere that lies within.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Square Enix
PCZ ISSUE 148

**DARK AGE OF CAMELOT**

The fantasy version of *PlanetSide* (although without the FPS-trappings) is still going strong, despite firm opposition. It's starting to show its age now, although a graphical overhaul due in a few months time might be enough to keep it competitive.

PUB Mythic Entertainment DEV Mythic Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 149

**STAR WARS GALAXIES**

Jump To Lightspeed has recently added the final piece of the Star Wars jigsaw – space combat – but is it too little, too late? There's a loyal audience of Jedi wannabes in there, but the Force is growing weaker. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to admire here, including a superb skill system.

PUB Activision DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 151

**EVERQUEST**

The original can't compare to its sequel in terms of looks and polished gameplay, but five years of expansions have kept its half a million regular players more than happy. There's more on the way too, just in case you feel like keeping it old school.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 149

**SECOND LIFE**

Not so much a game, more a second way of life. Live your dreams, fulfil your fantasies and get off with the hottie in the next virtual house at one of the many, many sexually-charged parties. Warning: dangerously addictive and definitely for adults only!

PUB Linden Research, Inc. DEV Linden Research, Inc
NOT REVIEWED

◀ ONLINE SHOOTERS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138

BATTLEFIELD 1942

Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience (minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life).

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovaLogic DEV NovaLogic

PCZ ISSUE 145

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA DEV DICE Canada

PCZ ISSUE 141

COUNTER-STRIKE SOURCE

The daddy of all online shooters is back, running on the jaw-dropping Half-Life 2 engine. All your favourites are here – Dust, Italy, Office – all with realistic physics. The only thing missing is HL2's ability to pick up objects, but it's surely only a mod away.

◀ SPORT

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005



Eidos and the *Champ Man* licence have got a hell of a lot to beat in Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – easily the most streamlined and absorbing management game to come out of its stable to date. It's management in its purest form, with an improved match engine working under the bonnet of a sparkling (well, green and grey) redesigned interface. We're just as addicted as we always were.

PUB Sega DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 149

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Fact. This is the finest arcade football gamer ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 149

VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

Some new game modes gives 2005's Tiger 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

NHL 2005

Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

◀ DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

◀ SPACE COMBAT

X2: THE THREAT



Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138

FREELANCER

Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128

X - GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82

TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk DEV Vicarious Visions

PCZ ISSUE 93

FREESPACE 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay DEV Volition Inc

PCZ ISSUE 84



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 142



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fifth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With excellent damage modelling and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 148



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

A sequel that's both bling and wicked, *NFSU2* capitalises on its predecessor's might with a superb free-roam mode, astounding graphics and even more mods, nips and tucks for your motor. It's most definitely very whack.

PUB EA DEV EA

PCZ ISSUE 150

DISC PAGES



DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

PRAISE THE PC



DISCWORLD

WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

As much as I worship at the altar of the PC, I'm not so much of a fangirl that I can't appreciate the joys of a console too. Christmas for instance, provides me with the once in a year chance to get my entire family playing games in the spirit of 'keeping up with the kids'. And let's be practical here - I can hardly lug my entire machine downstairs, complete with its black spaghetti of cables, and expect the entire family to huddle around the monitor like a scene straight out of a Charles Dickens novel. The simplicity of a console means I can just plug it into the TV and watch as my bemused mum tries to figure out which way round to hold the pad.

Simple they may be, but let's face it, consoles aren't too bright. Just the mere mention of DirectX9 features is enough to make them spit out a game disc in disgust. And of course, there's one outstanding reason to own a PC at the moment: *Half-Life 2*. For those of you who haven't tried it yet (shame on you!), there are two sections in the demo for you to sink your crowbar into.

The rest of you can also get to grips with the new Star Wars shooter, *Republic Commando*, tinker with the village people in *Settlers*, jet and ski around the landscape of *Tribes: Vengeance* and practise your tactical prowess in *Will Of Steel* and *Act Of War: Direct Action*. And don't forget about the 27 maps and mods for you to extend your *Half-Life 2* headcrab-exterminating session with. Yet more reasons to love your PC.

HALF-LIFE 2

DVD ONLY Pub: VU Games Dev: Valve Software Rev: Issue 148, 97%



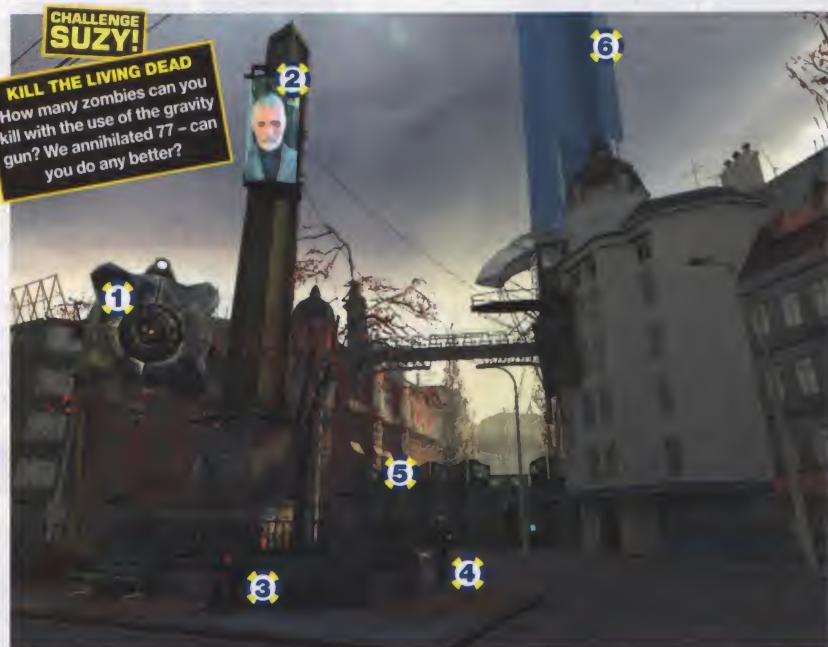
GAME OF The Year. Best FPS

Ever. The accolades for *Half-Life 2* keep flying in. To be honest, we're not even sure there's a valid excuse for not having it already installed (barring the lack of a DVD drive or

Internet connection - see Warning!). But those of you who have somehow missed the boat can install this demo for your chance to arrive in and explore City 17's train station, and then gear up for some sinister zombie blasting in Ravenholm.

WARNING!

To install the *Half-Life 2* demo you'll need a PC with Internet access. Valve's Steam client will install along with the playable demo.



PHYSICS LESSON

Physics at school may have bored you to tears but in the world of gaming, it's a different and much more exciting story. Guns and bullets are great, but there's a whole world of physics-laden possibilities in *Half-Life 2*



PLAYGROUND.

Rediscover your inner kid as you make yourself dizzy on the roundabout, play with bricks on the seesaw and push the swings in the playground. Wheeeeeeee!



SAW BLADES.

One of the most satisfying ways ever of dispatching an enemy. Line up zombies and chop them in half with the use of a handy circular saw blade - it's what physics was made for.



TRAP TOWN.

Crazy Father Grigori's traps litter the town of Ravenholm, and provide Gordon with a varied selection of ways to dispatch of the lurking nasties. We're especially keen on his use of scrapped cars.



IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a

library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV), bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain

games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. Unless you're a real pikey.

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDOS

CD1/DVD Pub: Activision Dev: LucasArts Rev: Issue 152, 80%

 **THE LATEST** Star Wars offering from LucasArts is a squad-based shooter with a tactical twist, and you can have the chance to see just how the Clone armour measures up in this exclusive playable demo. Playing as Delta Squad Lead, you must first rendezvous with the rest of your team of Commandos before going on to blast away the Droid army out to defend the ship you've boarded. Try this you must.

COMMANDO TACTICS

Playing as Delta Squad Lead you're the boss, so why not instruct your team-mates to give you the upper Clone hand. Your context-sensitive pointer allows you to roll over certain positions and hit the F key to issue commands



SNIPER POSITION Use the scenery to your advantage and order one of your squaddies to take up his hologram-scoped sniper rifle in support. It's the best thing for keeping enemies at a distance.

DOOR BREACH If you want a door opened, then why not storm in violently? Your Commandos flank the door and clear the entrance with a well-placed grenade before using the door as a shield.

ANTI-ARMOUR POSITION Facing off against the Spider Droid near the end of the level, you'll want one of your squad to cover this position for you. As well as providing some defence, it's all-important against the bigger enemies.

WILL OF STEEL

CD1/DVD Pub: GMX

Dev: Gameyus

 **THE JUMPIN'** Jack Flash mission is on offer in this modern warfare RTS, but there's no Whoopi Goldberg here – just a bunch of Russian MiGs to take out in an airport. Don't expect them to be unguarded, though – a minefield protects the perimeter while defence vehicles and troops patrol the innards.



EVE ONLINE: EXODUS

DVD Pub: CCP

Dev: CCP

Rev: Issue 152, 91%



 **YOU'VE** read the review, you've seen the score, so now try the game for free. For 14 days. Yep, you've got two whole weeks to let yourself loose upon the stars in this space-bound MMOG. Trade your way to glory, be a fearsome pirate or even set up a corporate trading empire Rupert Murdoch-style. It's up to you.

THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS



CD2/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Blue Byte Rev: Reviewed: Issue 152, 65%

DEMO HIGHLIGHTS

The engine looks gorgeous and the tech tree is extensive, but it's the little touches that make *Heritage Of Kings* stand out from the crowd. Here's our selection of favourites



PILGRIM'S WAY Your hero Pilgrim is an expert engineer and always carries small explosives that can be used to remove objects that may be in his path. And that includes enemy buildings.



ICE ICE BABY Your opposition's town lies on the other side of a bridge-less river. Instead of waiting for steel technology to be invented, cross in winter when the river freezes over into a slippery platform.



TRAINING DAY Once you've commissioned a new army unit, watch as they pour out of the building and into the courtyard. This is your opportunity to let them practise their skills before giving them orders.

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

DVD Pub: Atari

Dev: Eugen Systems



 **THIS EXCELLENT** playable demo of Eugen Systems' real-time strategy game sees you start off by clearing the beach-head in order to build a base and then complete the objectives using your arsenal of troops, buggies, drones and fighter planes.

IF YOUR name's Jurgen and your family snacks on bratwursts, you'll probably be quite familiar with the Settlers series. *Heritage Of Kings* looks set to bring the series firmly into the mainstream with its gorgeous visuals and superb animations. If the review's piqued your interest, then why not try out the tutorial and mission in this exclusive demo.

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

DVD Pub: VU Games Dev: Irrational Games

 **IN THE** wake of *Half-Life 2*, you might be looking for the next shooter to bust a cap in, so if you missed out on the delights of Irrational's skin-happy shooter before, we're confident you'll be won over by this awesome second demo. Playing as the über-cool Mercury, an android assassin, you'll be tasked with eliminating Daniel, the leader of the Phoenix tribe.



● ALSO ON THE CD *Xeno Assault II*, *Hearts Of Iron II*, *Castle Attack 2* (*Stronghold 2* mini-game), *Treasure Island Dizzy*, contents of this month's Indie Zone and *Carmageddon 2: Carnage Now*.

● ALSO ON THE DVD *Psychotoxic*, *Terrorist Takedown* and this month's Game That Changed The World: *System Shock 2*.



MOVIES

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

CD/DVD Brothers In Arms looks set to provide some of most authentic WWII experiences you can get whilst still nestled in the comfort and safety of your home.



LOCATIONS Settings are looking to be the most authentic ever.

PC ZONE



WEAPONS Gearbox shoots its load at the firing range.



DAMAGE Realistic damage ahoy! **CHARACTERS** Look With dismembered limbs!

my eyes...

ALSO SHOWING...



PROJECT: SNOWBLIND (DVD ONLY)

Beginning life as Deus Ex: Clan Wars, this excellent movie provides a sneak peek at the first-person action you can expect from Project: Snowblind. And while you're there, make sure you get a good look at the weapons on offer too – we reckon there's some real classics in the making there.

DON'T MISS The ability to throw up mobile shields. Armour on the move – we like!

STOLEN (DVD ONLY) A sexy woman in a catsuit is all some games need to sell but Anya Romanov, the heroine from Stolen, also possesses a repertoire of slick moves up her skin-tight sleeves. This is definitely one femme fatale you wouldn't want to leave alone with your wallet.

DON'T MISS Anya's legs wrapped round the guard's head. Sounds great but spells death.

WALL OF COMBINE (CD 1/DVD) This fantastic video has proved to be an office favourite with its test of the Source engine capabilities. Take a force of rebel soldiers armed with rocket launchers, drop them onto an Ant Lion-infested beach, line up an army of combine soldiers as target practice, then watch as the carnage commences.

DON'T MISS The lone Combine soldier left at the end meeting his long overdue death.

STRONGHOLD 2 (DVD ONLY) If some RTS battles leave you feeling cold, you should be intrigued by this movie showing off Stronghold 2's castle-sieging feature. Watch as trebuchets and catapults throw their weight against a solidly defended castle, while foot troops move in to mop up the resistance.

DON'T MISS The Castle Attack 2 mini-game in the demos section.

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** Steve Hill's FlatOut Reality Check footage

EXTENDED PLAY

HALF-LIFE 2 MAPS & MODS

ONE OF THE key reasons for Half-Life's longevity lay in its extensive mod community. Although Half-Life 2's not been out for long, maps and mods are already beginning to spring up from the community and we've got a selection of over 25 of them for you to try out. If last month's movie of a modified gravity gun sticking objects together tickled your fancy, then you'll be happy to find all of the welding functionality and more in the JBMOD.

Featuring similar welding techniques and the ability to pose ragdolls, fire props out of the rocket launcher, build working vehicles and more, Garry's mod makes the game into a physics playground. And don't forget the 18 custom maps on the disc too.

DON'T MISS The Depot train map. Trainspotting is the new best thing!



CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE BONUS MAP PACK

YOU'LL be happy to know there are more ways to wage war on the Nazis with this bonus map pack from Gray Matter. Featuring two United Offensive maps and six updated Call Of Duty maps, there should be plenty to keep your iron sights on.



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW EDITOR & SAMPLE MAPS

AS FAR as creeping about unnoticed goes, we all know that Sam Fisher is king and this editor allows you to create maps for the great sneaky one himself. There's also the Squat and Deftech2 maps in editor-friendly format to get a taster of just what's possible in the shadowy realm of Sam.



MODS OF THE MONTH

THIS MONTH there's Dice City – an urban combat mod for Battlefield: Vietnam, the multiplayer Jurassic Park mod for Far Cry, and Damnation – a fantasy western mod for UT2004 that's made the Make Something Unreal mod finals. German Front allows you to mess with history as you play the Germans in Call Of Duty, and The World of Padman is a beautifully executed cartoon-style mod for Quake 3.



BUG-FIX OF THE MONTH

THIS MONTH: EVIL GENIUS

Patch v1.01 fixes a rare crash involving monkeys. Crazy.

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** Two maps and the Daemon Hunters mod for Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War, Doom 3 CC mod, Doom 3 VIAGVA map, a Counter-Strike: Condition Zero map, a Codename: Panzers map, a Children Of The Nile Bonus Scenario and two Warcraft: The Frozen Throne maps.



HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type,

soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

NEXT MONTH HUGE EXCLUSIVE! **BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30**

Exclusive review and demo of the most realistic
WWII squad-based shooter ever – only in **PC ZONE!**

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

Huge review of LucasArts' role-playing sci-fi sequel!

ON THE DISCS

EVERQUEST II ISLE OF REFUGE GIVEAWAY

Play one of the best MMORPGs
ever – for FREE!

- **The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay**
- **Anarchy Online**

PLUS!

X2: THE RETURN

Into orbit with Egosoft's
space sim expansion

AND...

The 50 gaming
moments you
must experience
before you die!

**ALL THIS AND
MORE IN NEXT
MONTH'S PC ZONE,
ON SALE MARCH 3!**



PROFILE

In just a short year, Irrational Games has blossomed into one of the world's busiest and most well-respected games development studios. After *System Shock 2*, it released cult classic *Freedom Force* and excellent shooter *Homefront*. The team is currently working on *SWAT 4*, *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich* and *BioShock*.



NAME: Ken Levine

ROLE ON SS2:

Lead designer and scriptwriter

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Thief: The Dark Project

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Leaving up Irrational and working on *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich* and *BioShock*.



NAME: Jonathan Chey

ROLE ON B&W:

Project manager
and programmer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON:

Flight Unlimited II

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Working on *Freedom Force Vs The Third Reich* at Irrational, as well as developing new technologies for future games.



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

ON THE DVD

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

The face of the RPG genre could have been very different had it not been for the vision of a small development company. Martin Korda uncovers the story behind a masterpiece...

GAME System Shock 2

DEVELOPER Irrational Games

PUBLISHER EA

RELEASED 1999

INFLUENCED In the few years since its release, *System Shock 2*'s influence has been massive, both within the RPG and FPS genres. Its open-ended gameplay and first-person perspective played a massive role in influencing all of the modern-day first-person RPGs, including *Morrowind* and *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines*. It also helped change the way stories are presented in games, doing away with cut-scenes and instead forwarding the plot through the use of personal logs found scattered throughout the game. The number of games that have used this storytelling technique since are innumerable. Big up *System Shock*.

IMAGINE a world in which *Deus Ex*, *Morrowind*, *Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines* never existed. It's a scenario that's not as far-fetched as you may think. Had it not been for 1999's ground-breaking *System Shock 2* – a game that helped reinvent the RPG genre and led it confidently down the revolutionary first-person perspective path first pioneered by *Ultima Underworld* and later by *System Shock* – then perhaps we'd never have had a chance to experience these more recent RPG gems.

System Shock 2 was a revelation, its perfectly-crafted plot submerging you into a dark and sinister science-fiction world in which you had to uncover the

truth behind the mass murder of your ship's crew members – and your true identity. From the breadth of its character creation options and the unique way in which your abilities shaped how you played the game, to its deeply compelling, mature and intelligently crafted plot that explored the struggle between humanity and machines, *System Shock 2*'s influence still resonates like a crashing bell throughout the entire genre.

It was also the game that was to forge the foundation for Irrational Games to build upon, a titanic debut title that would not only enable the developer to blossom into one of the most sought after games

development teams in the world, but also stamp its influence on RPG gaming history forever.

Having cut their teeth on *Thief: The Dark Project* at legendary games development house Looking Glass Studios, Ken Levine and Jonathan Chey formed Irrational Games in 1998. The pair then quickly set about collaborating with their previous employer on an all-new project.

"When we started Irrational, Paul Neurath of Looking Glass, who we knew from working there, came to us and said, 'so, we've got this *Thief* engine which you guys have worked on. We'd like to

use it for another game. Have you guys got any ideas?" recalls Ken. "We all shouted, 'System Shock 2! System Shock 2!', and Paul said, 'That's great, but we don't have the rights.' Undeterred, we then said, 'OK, something similar to *System Shock 2*.' And so work began on a game called *Shock* (see what they did there?), and several months later Irrational was presenting a prototype to the bigwigs at EA, which, through a twist of fate, owned the rights to *System Shock*. Can you guess what happened next?

WEIGHT OF EXPECTATION

Being handed the *System Shock* licence on an EA-branded platter brought with it not only a unique opportunity for the newly-formed Irrational team to make a name for itself, but also crushing pressure to create a game worthy of its legendary predecessor. This is something the two men were acutely aware of as they set about their task. But as Ken explains, *System Shock*'s legacy also brought with it its own inimitable benefits.

"*System Shock* really set the tone for *System Shock 2*. It allowed us to

treat the subject matter much more seriously than a space opera or a zombie frag-fest. It expanded on what *Ultima Underworld* did in terms of emergence and even physical simulation," explains Ken.

"As well as that, it established a structure for knitting together first-person shooters and role-playing games," adds Jonathan. "I think *System Shock* really established the notion of immersion in a stronger way than it had ever been done before, with the player being an actual entity in a simulated universe."

And so development on *System Shock 2* began in earnest, with Irrational's small team throwing itself into the project with unwavering commitment and a lucid idea of the direction in which it wanted to take the game.

"*System Shock 2* never really changed much from the original conception," remembers Ken. "To be

honest, the *Thief* engine wasn't exactly a visual powerhouse. Knowing that we couldn't compete graphically with the Quakes and the *Unreals* of the world, we decided to focus on gameplay, specifically on story and RPG elements. From the first prototype, we had the whole notion of a Shoot Mode and an

Interact Mode in the interface. It got tweaked a bunch, but that was always there. The first prototype played very much like the final game, but in a far cruder form."

But just like any ambitious project, *System Shock 2*'s development was not bereft of problems, both technical and personal, the latter

causing several heated arguments between some of Irrational's most senior members. "Me and a guy called Rob Fermier had huge fights about the whole notion of the player being tricked early on by SHODAN," recalls Ken of his arguments about one of the game's pivotal characters.

"In the game, you're led to believe that you're being guided by someone named Polito, who is actually SHODAN in disguise. I wanted to mess with the player's trust for the information the game was giving them, and Rob thought that would alienate the gamer. I think I was right on that one."

However, Ken is man enough to accept that he wasn't always right. The

much maligned weapon degeneration system, which would see your gun jamming at the most inappropriate moments due to cumulative wear and tear, was actually Ken's idea. It's also one of his biggest regrets. "I didn't get death threats over that feature, but you wouldn't want your mother reading some of what's been posted about it," he admits.

HOLES IN THE CODE

Irrational's already gargantuan goal of creating a revolutionary game was made even harder thanks to the team having to work with an unfinished version of the Dark Engine throughout most of the project. With only months to spare before *System Shock 2* was to ship, the finished version of the Dark Engine



SS2 set a new standard for RPG games.



One of the game's few negative points was the weapon degeneration system.

CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT, THE FUTURE'S BIOSHOCK

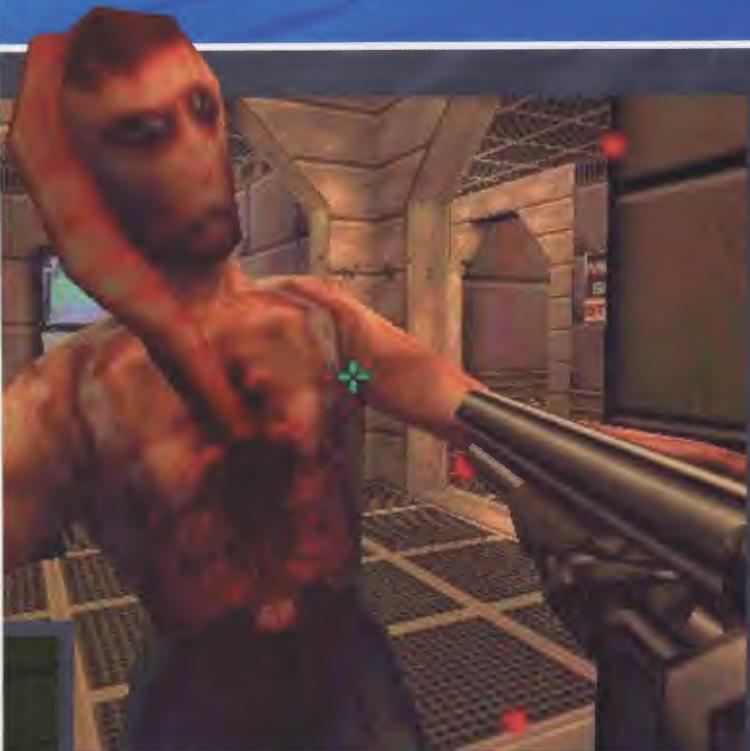
OK, it's not *System Shock 3*, but it's the next best thing. For the best part of three years, Irrational has been secretly working on *BioShock*, an open-ended first-person RPG set in a deserted WWII laboratory and bearing more than a passing resemblance to *System Shock 2*. In fact, Irrational has even gone so far as to say that *BioShock* is the spiritual successor to *System Shock 2*.

As if that wasn't exciting enough, the project is made all the more mouth-watering by the fact the team working on it is almost identical to the team that created *System Shock 2*, including Ken Levine, Jonathan Chey and the brains behind *System Shock 2*'s sublime sound and music Eric Brosius.

The game is still pretty far from completion, but we're already more than a little moist at the prospect of it. Could Irrational be about to repeat history and reinvent the genre once again? Time will tell.



Now that's definitely a ten-pinter.



Developed in just over a year, SS2 was a stunning piece of programming.



How could we forget?

finally arrived from Looking Glass Studios, forcing Irrational to work in sweatshop-conditions in order to eradicate as many bugs as possible.

The team succeeded, but the diversion of manpower from the main game coding is something both men would like to have avoided, especially given the minuscule size and general inexperience of the team, small budget and most amazingly of all,

"I didn't get death threats, but I'm glad my mother never read the posts"

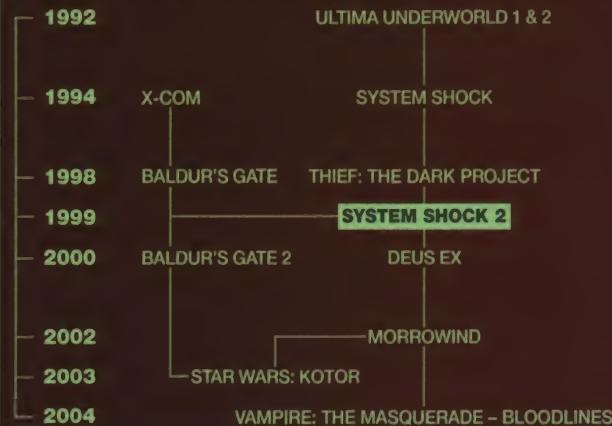
KEN LEVINE LEAD DESIGNER AND SCRIPTWRITER, SYSTEM SHOCK 2

a ridiculously short development time-frame of just over a year. In fact, given its sheer scope and quality, *System Shock 2* must surely go down as one of the most impressive programming feats in gaming history.

However, as Jonathan Chey recalls, not all of the problems were as stressful as ironing out bugs and wanting to stomp each other's heads in. Some were just downright weird. "One time when the EA

FAMILY TREE

Games don't get much more influential than *System Shock 2*. In truth, it was *Ultima Underworld* that first dabbled with the first-person perspective, freeform RPG template. However, it was *System Shock 2* that took this concept and perfected it, providing the model that all RPGs have aspired to match and better ever since.



bigwigs came to visit, I had to do a quick run around the office to make sure it met basic sanitation requirements. Among other things I had to clean up were a plastic cup full of tobacco chew spit and human hair where someone had decided to give themselves a haircut." Nice.

RECKONING DAY

After endless months of hard labour, the game was finally ready to be unleashed on a now hugely expectant public, buoyed by universally positive press coverage and a belief that maybe, just maybe, Irrational Games had done the impossible – not only created a game that did justice to *System Shock*, but a game that raised the RPG bar yet further.

Undoubtedly, *System Shock 2* was a triumph, still holding its own today. "The RPG system was better and more thought out than that of the original game," states Ken proudly. "The shooter experience was more satisfying too because we were working with a 3D engine, had 'mouse look' and a more intuitive interface." Aren't you forgetting something Ken? "Oh, and we had monkeys!" Well we had to mention it at least once in this feature, didn't we?

Jonathan is more reserved in his assessment of *System Shock 2*. "In some ways, SS2 was less ambitious than the original in the sense that we

"I also think the character creation process should have been pulled from the front end and moved into the game itself. The 'Choose A Path' system (part of the character creation setup that gave you the choice of specialising either in combat or more cerebral abilities) was clumsy and a barrier to entry," concludes Jonathan.

A NEW DAWN

Despite a smattering of faults and shortcomings, few could argue with the fact that *System Shock 2* redefined the RPG genre, melding tension, terror, characterisation and a compelling plot into one shiny package. The game not only still stands as one of the greatest games ever created, but one that has inspired a new generation of RPGs.

The game's influence also resonates within the FPS genre, with the likes of *AvP2* and *Doom 3* both using *System Shock 2*'s pioneering concept of expanding the plot through personal logs found throughout each level, as well as copying *System Shock 2*'s masterful and ground-breaking use of sound to generate a blood-thickening atmosphere of pure terror.

"*System Shock 2* was the first game of the modern era – a first-person game with mouse look and 3D graphics – that really meshed RPG elements, story and action in a cohesive fashion," says Ken. "We were trying to push the notion of Playground Design, where you're given a large, open-ended toolset and unleashed upon an emergent interactive world, and if we opened a few eyes to that style of gameplay, that's very gratifying."

If ever there was an RPG from the last five years that genuinely changed the face of gaming, then *System Shock 2* is it. It was the sublime creation of a small but driven team determined to make a great sequel, which instead created a genuine masterpiece that would set the standards and the direction for the genre to this very day. And for that, we'll all be eternally grateful. □



Search For a Game EXTRA!

HI EVERYBODY!

Welcome to Search For A Game... **EXTRA!** here on PCZ2.

This is where we fill up dead-air on a channel that no-one watches with juicy backstage gossip that goes unseen on the main program. Yeah! Ace!

Next month brings us the Grand Final, in which you get to **VOTE** on who you want to win. Believe you me, you can cut the excitement with a butter knife back here as the eager hopefuls sweat it out, make final changes to their final pitch and rehearse their speeches one last time. **MEGA!** Aren't I sexy!

Seeing as you've all read Search For a Game for months now, there's no point in telling you this, but telling you **AGAIN** is **CHEAPER**. We've had games based on films, games based on popular TV shows and games based on books. We had more zombie and 'GTA meets...' ideas

than you could possibly imagine (including several 'GTA meets the zombies' ones), and even one idea in which the game would not only invade other games on your PC if you failed, but would delete your hard drive, destroy your PC and send a lethal pulse of electricity through your mouse killing you **SUPER!** I have shiny teeth and breasts!

And then there was this! Just after the audition doors closed for the final time, we received one last pitch through the post. We opened the envelope, pulled out the disk inside and spent the rest of the morning rolling around laughing. Not only was it **GOOD**, but also we could spin it out for **AGES** on PCZ2 and also use it for **FREE**.

So enjoy it! Because all that we're going to put on this show afterwards are vague attempts to bully a poor man who works in a **CHICKEN FACTORY** with his game ideas about **IRON SMELTING!** Watch me wiggle my wide child-bearing hips while I wink suggestively!

THE LORD OF THE RINGS REALTIME AGRICULTURAL SIMULATOR

Fear isn't the only thing growing in Middle-earth



Constant lava flows make the soil fertile. Research marrow fat peas!

YOU PLAY Frodo as he struggles to grow crops under increasingly less fertile conditions. Starting in the Shire, you must research and grow, in real-time, a variety of vegetables and fruit while under the watchful eye of one of the Fellowship. They will inform you of general game information as well as handy gardening advice. You

will also hear news on the grapevine of your competitors' progress (multiplayer potential?) as you head towards the end of level fruit and veg showdown.

NOTICE: The real-life sender of this game idea forgot to include his (her? its?) name and address! So with no way of knowing who had created this masterpiece, it was unfortunately disqualified. As we thought it was just so good, we're presenting it to you here in full, and we'd like the author to write back in to us (telling us what was so special about the disc it was sent on to prove it's them) so we can give you a special prize. Yay!

"Well done Frodo. You've researched kumquats."



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